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**WAGNER'S DRAMAS AND GREEK  
TRAGEDY**

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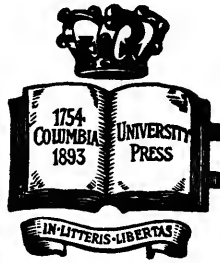
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# WAGNER'S DRAMAS AND GREEK TRAGEDY

BY  
PEARL CLEVELAND WILSON, PH.D.



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# WAGNER'S DRAMAS AND GREEK TRAGEDY

## CHAPTER I

### WAGNER'S ENTHUSIASM FOR GREEK AND HIS GENIUS FOR DRAMATIC EXPRESSION IN MUSIC

ARISTOTLE's definition has often served as a starting-point for analyses of tragedy. But melody, which he calls the greatest of the embellishments, has long been separated from drama, and subject and style have changed with form. Poets have not remained musicians, as they were in ancient Greece, but one musician of modern times has written great tragedies. Richard Wagner composed ten dramas that are performed by opera companies, though they are almost as far from being operas as they are from being plays. To find as indissoluble a union of music and words in drama, we must go back to the choral odes of Attic tragedy. But while Greek tragedies are dramatic poems, with their range of expression extended by music, Wagner's works are dramatic symphonies, with their meaning made clear by words. It is not possible to compare them without being conscious, at every step, of this fundamental difference. Allowing for it, however, we find many points of resemblance.

This is not surprising; for Wagner's enthusiasm for the Greeks was intense and persistent. Chamberlain, in his biography of Wagner,<sup>1</sup> directs attention to the fact that "of all the really great masters of the musical art Wagner is the only one who enjoyed a thorough classical education," and Wagner himself says, "I believe there can have been no boy

<sup>1</sup> p. 36.

more devoted to classic antiquity than myself at the time I attended the Kreuzschule in Dresden."<sup>1</sup> When thirteen, he translated the first twelve books of the *Odyssey*, though no other member of his class read more than one.<sup>2</sup> His teacher even urged him to make philology his profession. While still in school, he sketched a tragedy in the Greek style, and Glase-napp quotes him as saying later: "My childish impressions of classical antiquity and of the seriousness of the antique, so far as I became acquainted with it in the Gymnasium, may have been the cause of the contempt, amounting even to loathing, which I felt for our bepainted comedies."<sup>3</sup>

Wagner did not study composition until, at fifteen, the chance discovery of Beethoven's music to *Egmont* inspired him with the desire to write a similar setting for the "great tragedy" he had just finished. He was obliged then, as he says, "to master the technique of an entirely separate and complicated subject. This presented greater difficulties than I had met with in writing verse, which came to me fairly easily. It was these difficulties that drove me to adopt a career which bore some resemblance to that of a professional musician, whose future distinction would be to win the titles of Conductor and Writer of Opera."<sup>4</sup>

At thirty-five, Wagner resumed the study of Greek, to make up, he says,<sup>5</sup> for the deficiencies in "my boyhood's knowledge of the eternal elements of human culture, and the neglect of this field of learning due to the life I had been obliged to lead." "For the first time I now mastered Aeschylus with real feeling and understanding. Droysen's eloquent commentaries in particular helped to bring before my imagination the intoxicating effect of the production of an Athenian tragedy, so that I could see the *Oresteia* with my mind's eye, as though it were actually being performed, and its effect on me was

<sup>1</sup> P. W., V, p. 292.

<sup>3</sup> I, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Ellis, *Life of Wagner*, p. 93.

<sup>4</sup> *My Life*, p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> *My Life*, pp. 411, 415-416.

indescribable, . . . to the last word of the *Eumenides* I lived in an atmosphere so far removed from the present day that I have never since been able to reconcile myself with modern literature. My ideas about the whole significance of the drama and of the theatre were, without a doubt, moulded by these impressions. I worked my way through the other tragedians, and finally reached Aristophanes. My delight in the comedies . . . was boundless, when once his *Birds* had plunged me into the full torrent of the genius of this wanton favorite of the Graces. . . . Side by side with this poet I read the principal dialogues of Plato, and from the *Symposium* I gained such a deep insight into the wonderful beauty of Greek life that I felt myself more truly at home in ancient Athens than in any conditions which the modern world has to offer." The dramas composed after this are distinguished by a mastery of idiom such as was seen only here and there in Wagner's earlier works. They contain also the most and the closest parallels to Greek tragedy.

The persistence of this influence is seen in Wagner's last achievement — the building of the theatre in Bayreuth and the institution of the first festivals. He says,<sup>1</sup> "History gave me a model also for that ideal relation of the theatre to the public which I had in mind. I found it in the drama of ancient Athens — there where the theatre opened its doors only on the days of certain religious festivals, where art was enjoyed as a part of the celebration of a solemn rite, in which the most distinguished statesmen took part as poets and actors, and appeared as priests, as it were, before the assembled populace of city and country, which was filled with so high an expectation of the lofty character of the art-work to be produced, that an Aeschylus, a Sophocles, could bring out the most profoundly significant poetic dramas, feeling certain that they would be understood by the people."

<sup>1</sup> VII, p. 99.

While Wagner's lifelong enthusiasm for Greek tragedy accounts for much in his dramas, it is easy to understand why the controlling factor is not words, but music. Wagner was born at the time when Beethoven's symphonies were revealing the almost infinite possibilities of the orchestra as a medium for poetic expression. Its newly discovered resources so far surpassed those of the German language in melodiousness and flexibility that it was the natural thing for Wagner, once he had gained command of them, to develop them to the utmost. Melodic effects, achieved indirectly in poetry through word-combinations, are actually produced by musical tones, to which the contrasting *timbre* of the different orchestral instruments may give almost endless variety of quality as well as pitch. In rhythm, too, the musician's range is wider than the poet's. He can change more frequently, and by using two, or even more rhythms simultaneously he can produce the feeling of tension or conflict that is the essence of drama. To tell a definite story, however, words are indispensable, and the text of Wagner's dramas is not unlike a skeleton, which determines the form of the music and is clothed by it with beauty, dignity, and significance.

How closely related text and music are, can best be understood from a letter written by Wagner in 1844, and translated in part by H. T. Finck in *Wagner and His Works* (II, p. 24): "In the first place no subjects attract me except such as present a musical as well as poetic import at the same time. Then, before I begin to make a verse, or even to project a scene, I am already intoxicated by the musical fragrance of my task. I have all the tones, all the characteristic motives in my head, so that when the verses are completed and the scenes arranged, the opera is practically finished so far as I am concerned, and the detailed execution of the work is little more than a quiet after-labor, which has been preceded by the real motives of creation. For this purpose, it is true, I must select such sub-



jects only as are capable of no other but a musical treatment: never would I choose a subject which might as well have been used by a playwright for a spoken drama." This is enough to indicate how Wagner's works differ, in the manner of their conception, from operas. He himself said: "I write no more operas: since I do not wish to invent an arbitrary name for my works, I call them dramas, this designation at least serving to express most clearly the standpoint which must be taken so as to receive that which I have to offer."<sup>1</sup>

Chamberlain says in *The Wagnerian Drama*:<sup>2</sup> "It will not be lightly denied that the most intense and moving action is that which passes in the innermost soul. . . . But it is denied that this action can be represented otherwise than by words and visible deeds. Every time, therefore, that Wagner . . . descends into the depths of the 'invisible soul' in order to reveal to us by means of music the true action . . . there, — we are told: 'that is undramatic.' But it can only appear undramatic to one who, for the good reason that music reveals nothing to him, really does not perceive the action." "If music can never be anything else but 'arabesques of sound,' then Wagner's whole art goes by the board. His drama bases itself on the assumption that music can speak to us as the revelation from another world, and that we shall consequently be able to go further with the help of music than with the language of the understanding and with the eyes; music is therefore with him a medium of dramatic expression. . . . It is certain, however, that it is impossible to enter into a logical argument touching this point. For if I have the 'overwhelming conviction' that a certain music reveals another world to me, . . . no one can logically prove that I do not feel this; but it is just as impossible for me to prove to him that this music reveals anything to me."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> G. S. IV, p. 343 (Chamberlain's trans.).

<sup>2</sup> pp. 176-177.

<sup>3</sup> pp. 175-176.

## CHAPTER II

### DO WAGNER'S DRAMAS UPHOLD THE DOCTRINE OF MIGHT OR THE DOCTRINE OF SELF-SACRIFICE?

IF Wagner's dramas were as generally understood as Shakespeare's, this question need not be asked here. No one considers Macbeth a strong character, or claims that a low ideal of womanhood produced Imogen. Yet such misconceptions are more or less prevalent with regard to Wotan and Brünnhilde. One meets with them oftener in conversation than in print, and they frequently result from assuming that Wagner's characters are the same as those bearing their names in some familiar literary version of the legend. Yet Wagner's Tristan, who prefers death to disloyalty in Act I, and his Isolde, who dies unwed, are very different from the guilty lovers elsewhere described. And Wagner's King Mark, who loves Tristan like a son, and hardly becomes acquainted with the princess from over the sea, cannot be looked upon as an outraged husband. In the end he says to Isolde: "When all was revealed which had been kept from me before, how great my joy to find my friend free from guilt! With swelling sails, I hastened to follow, that I might marry thee to the man I hold dear."

Sometimes a visual impression, received at a performance, is not corrected by referring to words and music, and the shortcomings of a singer are accepted as the composer's intention. A friend of mine was particularly interested, at her first hearing of *Parsifal*, in the effect of "coarseness and rudeness that Wagner evidently meant to produce in the *Parsifal* of Act I." I saw that *Parsifal*, and know how well her words

describe him. But Wagner makes Gurnemanz say, in Act I, to Parsifal, "Noble thou seemest, and highborn."

The impression that Wagner's dramas uphold the doctrine of might, and glorify the hero who forces his will upon the world about him, has as little justification as the outworn theory that Euripides was a misogynist. Wotan is such a character, and of all Wagner's heroes he is the least admirable, and wins the least sympathy. An audience will be moved by the suffering of Tannhäuser, though he never condones his faults, but remain cold to the suffering of Wotan, who has always an excuse for the sin that caused it. He knew that he did wrong in robbing Alberich, but there was no other way of getting the gold to buy the fortress whose possession meant supreme power. His supremacy is to him a sacred obligation — without it, he sincerely believes, the world would go to ruin. When he begins to doubt his ability to keep it, he lets war loose on the earth. For the injustice to the Rhinemaidens, unfortunately incidental to his rise to world-dominion, Wotan magnanimously plans reparation, once his end is attained. When the fortress is made secure, manned by an army of warriors and Valkyrs, then a hero shall be brought into the world to slay the fortress-builder, take the gold Wotan paid him, and return it to the Rhine. Meanwhile, let the Rhinemaidens stop complaining — they have lost their gold, but they may sun themselves in the light of Wotan's glory instead. To his power he sacrifices his children, Siegmund and Brünnhilde, grieving deeply, it is true, but actually believing no other course possible. The thought of giving up the fortress never occurs to him. This fatal inability to measure himself by the standard used for others is the cause of Wotan's downfall. He established his power on the sacred laws of compact, he makes the races of earth bow to them, and punishes all who defy them; but when their bond grows irksome, he himself tries to break or evade it. "You took the agreement seriously,"

he says to the giants, "which we made only in jest. . . . Think of another reward." Wotan looks out upon the world through an eye impaired by lust for power. Like a distorting lens, it prevents his seeing things in their true relations. Only the agony of mortal terror, or of utter despair, corrects this defective vision and gives him, on rare occasions, a glimpse of the truth. But after the most exalted of these moments — the scene with Erda in *Siegfried* — he slips back into a fit of violent anger at the *lèse-majesté* of Siegfried, who takes the king of gods for a quarrelsome old man! Wotan loses love and power by his unbridled impulse to assert his will.

Not the assertion, but the forgetting of self, not the arbitrary rule, but the voluntary service of others — these are the ideals Wagner's dramas uphold. It is not the defiant will of the Flying Dutchman, but the compassion of Senta that we are led to admire. And even he does not gain the long-sought release till he puts her safety before his own. When he meets Daland, he is eager to seize any opportunity that may lead to deliverance. "Have you a daughter?" he asks. "Yes, a dear child," answers Daland. "Let her be my wife!" The demand is as unreasoning as the clutch of a drowning man. No question about other suitors, or about the probability of her becoming the "wife, faithful unto death," who alone can deliver him from his curse. But after he has met Senta, and knelt before the miracle of her sympathy, he overhears Eric's reproachful pleading. Without waiting to learn Senta's attitude toward the young lover, the Dutchman rushes aboard his ship. If Senta married him, with another love in her heart, she too would fall under the curse; if he leaves before the wedding, she will be free. "Thousands were lost through me," he cries, "but thou shalt be saved!"

Tannhäuser, too, the pleasure-seeker, learns self-denial before winning redemption. Here again the loving sympathy of a woman is made the redeeming power; but we cannot

help feeling that Tannhäuser is saved, not merely because Elizabeth prays for him, but because the spiritual heroism of her defence awakens in him, at last, a desire free from selfishness. For her sake, he undertakes the pilgrimage. She besought the knights to spare his life for repentance; to prove himself worthy of her prayer, he voluntarily multiplies the hardships of the journey. The other pilgrims wear sandals; barefoot, he chooses paths where stones and thorns abound. They sleep at inns; he lies outside on the frozen earth. All this and more he does, "to sweeten the tears" shed for him by Elizabeth. Beside her tender sympathy Wagner places the noble sympathy of Wolfram. He loves Elizabeth enough to sacrifice his own hope of winning her, in order to bring back the forgetful minstrel who had sung his way into her heart. After she dies, it is Wolfram who, by main force, stops Tannhäuser in his desperate rush toward the *Venusberg*, and makes it possible for him to die redeemed.

Devotion, like Wolfram's, wholly free from self-interest, is found again in Hans Sachs, for whom it wins the loving homage of Nuremberg, and in Parsifal, whom it brings to the leadership of the knights of the Holy Grail. Lohengrin, the son of Parsifal, leaves the peace of the Grail's domain, and in order to protect Elsa comes to live and fight among the evils of earth. The tragedy that ensues is the result of Elsa's inability to make in return a smaller sacrifice, like those made by the Dutchman and Tannhäuser. Even *Tristan and Isolde*, the drama of love and longing, is not without its episode of self-sacrifice. Putting loyalty above his own desire, Tristan takes the goblet offered by Isolde, King Mark's betrothed. After months of hopeless longing, Tristan has just discovered that she loves him. She has made it clear that the drink is poison, and before he touches it she utters the appeal, "Tristan, am I forgiven? What hast thou to say to me?" Without a word of love, Tristan drinks the potion.

Siegfried, of course, makes no sacrifice. Free as the wind and glad as the sunlight, his charm is the charm of youth. He is so taken up with the joy of living that the sight of suffering only puzzles him. He is like the Parsifal of Act I. Both are children of the forest, surcharged with vigor, and possessing an innate nobility of character, whose possibilities of development are almost without limit. With weapons that they make for themselves they slay monsters and earn the fear of the wicked; but they lack the sympathetic understanding indispensable to those who are to right the wrongs and heal the wounds of the world. Parsifal gains this understanding through suffering, but Siegfried is killed, without experiencing a moment of real distress, and consequently without performing the act which will free the world from the curse of greed. That is done by Brünnhilde, who has learned through anguish the need of gods and men. She is beyond question the noblest character in the *Ring*, and the only one who cares so deeply for the welfare of others that she forgets her own in the effort to secure it.

The ideal, then, that Wagner upholds constantly — even in the pagan drama of the *Ring* — is the Christian ideal of sympathy and self-sacrifice, and those who interpret his dramas differently seem to me either to be misled by something relatively superficial, such as the self-glorification of Wotan, or to consider only such incidents as accord with some theory of their own, ignoring all the rest. This is what Nietzsche did, and also Bernard Shaw, when they grew enthusiastic over Siegfried. To them he stood for the ideal man, fearless and strong, free from all mean impulses, overthrowing false traditions that have ruled the world, climbing to his desire. He is all this, of course, and he is likewise a very lovable boy, as the awakened Brünnhilde discovers — one that might easily grow into the perfect hero. But in Wagner's drama he performs only half of the task which is represented as the greatest

and the most needed by the world. It is the half that calls for bravery and physical strength — the slaying of the dragon. To represent Siegfried as the complete and ideal hero, it seems to me, Wagner would have had to make him accomplish the other half of the task as well, and give the ring back to the Rhine. That is the half that requires understanding and moral courage — willingness to give up the chance to rule the world in order to right a wrong committed long before his birth. Siegfried is ready to part with the ring in return for love, or even, perhaps, for a wild boar — he cares nothing for power — but he goes no further than the thought of exchange. He has not the understanding and sympathy that grow from suffering. It is Brünnhilde who attains this, and restores the ring.

## CHAPTER III

### GREEK INFLUENCE AND GREEK PARALLELS IN WAGNER'S WORK

To what extent the form and character of Wagner's work were directly influenced by his acquaintance with Greek, would be hard to decide. Only Wagner himself could have told of the occasions — if there were any — when he consciously chose to follow a certain path, because it ran parallel to something in Greek tragedy. But even he could not have known how differently he might have shaped the medium in which he worked, if his mind had not been impressed so early and so deeply by the noble beauty of Greek ideals. The significant facts in this connection seem to be two: first, that one of the greatest musicians of the nineteenth century received lasting inspiration from the study of Greek; and second, that in opera-houses today dramas are being sung that may be looked upon as constituting, in some respects, a modern parallel to the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

The relation between these facts is undoubtedly that of cause and effect. Wagner was possessed, from boyhood till the day of his death, by an ardent enthusiasm for Greek literature, especially Greek tragedy, and there are countless passages in his works that show, either in choice of subject or method of treatment, the result of this. But there is no instance of actual imitation. Perhaps Wagner never showed himself wiser than when, with all his love for Greek mythology, he refrained from appropriating any of the subjects it offered. For a few years, he did intend to write a drama with Achilles for its hero, but he ended by giving us instead



the Siegfried of *The Nibelung's Ring*. In dramatizing legends of his own race, Wagner was much more truly a follower of the Greeks than he could ever have become by re-clothing classic heroes in Teutonic garb.

What Wagner learned from the Greeks, he assimilated. It became part of his way of thinking and working, and he would probably have been as surprised as was the writer to discover how many exact parallels could be drawn between parts of his dramas and of Greek tragedies. The fact that often a passage in Wagner is, in different ways, parallel to two or more entirely unrelated passages in Greek tragedy, testifies to his unconscious use of what he had absorbed. If he had not said so often that Greek meant much to him, we might call all the parallels accidental; but in view of that, and of the exceedingly large number from which those in this essay were selected, it seems likely that some, at least, are the outcome of more than chance. It is even possible that when constructing the first scene of *Tristan and Isolde*, Wagner recalled the *Hippolytus*, and that in writing the end of the *Meistersinger*, he thought of the reconciliation in the conclusion of the *Eumenides*, though it is equally possible that he did not. On the other hand, we may see a direct result of Greek influence in the profound seriousness that pervades Wagner's dramas, and in the large and simple lines on which the characters are drawn and the plots constructed.

After writing three operas in the style of his contemporaries, Wagner broke a new path with the composition of the *Flying Dutchman*. It is the first to bear the stamp of his peculiar genius, and its central figure is a wanderer, constantly baffled in his search for home, like Odysseus, who had captured Wagner's boyish imagination. He says: "The figure of the 'Flying Dutchman' is a mythical creation of the Folk: a primal trait of human nature speaks out from it with heart-enthralling force. This trait, in its most universal meaning,

is the longing after rest from amid the storms of life. In the blithe world of Greece we meet with it in the wanderings of Ulysses and his longing after home, house, hearth and wife: the attainable, and at last attained reward of the city-loving son of ancient Hellas."<sup>1</sup> Wagner's next drama, *Tannhäuser*, again derived from a legend, represents the conflict between man's higher and lower impulses. Here, too, we may be reminded of the *Odyssey*, for Venus keeps Tannhäuser in her grotto, as Calypso keeps Odysseus on her island, till, by the aid of a higher power, he is freed to return to Elizabeth, as Odysseus returned to Penelope. The story of *Lohengrin* resembles that of Zeus and Semele, and by the time Wagner had completed it, he understood the nature of his dramatic bent. It had found its best expression by taking legendary subjects, and presenting them so as to embody some fundamental problem of human life and to point toward a solution. This made his dramas interpretations rather than representations of experience, and his characters typical rather than individual. In subject and dramatic treatment they were less like the German and English drama, with which Wagner was familiar, than like Greek tragedy, which he had read only in translation. He felt, therefore, that in order to develop his talent to the most of which it was capable, he must know Greek better. So he took up the course of study already described.<sup>2</sup> Then, fired by the glow kindled on the altar of Dionysus under the inspired touch of Greek poets, Wagner turned back to the modern theatre, and wrote four music-dramas, which in the union of grandeur, beauty, and profoundly human significance have not been approached in the operatic field: *Tristan and Isolde*, *Meistersinger*, the *Ring*, and *Parsifal*.

So Wagner followed the Greeks, instinctively at first, and later consciously, in choosing mythical subjects from the early epics of his own people. But he altered them with greater

<sup>1</sup> I, p. 307.

<sup>2</sup> p. 2.

freedom, for the Teutonic legends were associated only with poetry, while those of the Greeks were part of their religion. (We may note in passing that Wagner surrounded his last drama, *Parsifal*, with a religious halo, and called it a *Bühnenweihfestspiel*.) The radical changes Wagner made in the legends he adapted all tend toward the elimination of detail, and the re-casting on broader and simpler lines, with strong emphasis on ethical values. One result is that the main interest lies in the situation of the characters rather than in their individual peculiarities. What is the experience of a woman forced to choose between obedience to her king's command and obedience to her highest conception of right? What does she do and what does she suffer? These are the questions answered in Wagner's Brunnhilde of *The Nibelung's Ring* and in the Antigone of Sophocles — she obeys the "unwritten law," and her reward is death and fame undying. What are the consequences of crime? Does wrongdoing stop with the criminal act, or does one crime give rise to another, and the second to a third, till the suffering of many, innocent as well as guilty, results from the selfish violence of one? Wagner's *Ring* is a magnificent portrayal of the evil set in motion by the hand that robs. The colossal proportions of the drama, the cumulative effect of the succession of crimes, the convincing power with which Wagner represents as a law of the universe the justice that lets no crime go unpunished, and that teaches through suffering — all these bear witness to what he learned from Aeschylus and his unapproachable presentation of the evil started by the hand that kills.

But the finest thing, probably, in all Wagner's work, is his portrayal of the beauty and the power of sympathy. He said once that the subject of his dramas was love; and it is true that every one, from the *Flying Dutchman* to *Parsifal*, represents, in some way, the love that causes one to feel another's suffering as though it were his own, and, with utter

self-forgetfulness, to make every sacrifice to relieve it.<sup>1</sup> Like Euripides, Wagner created heroines whose self-sacrifice moves us deeply. Senta, Elizabeth, and Brünnhilde are, in this sense, successors of Alcestis, Macaria, Evadne, and Iphigenia. The men whom Wagner represents as guided by sympathy — Wolfram, Lohengrin, Sachs, and Parsifal — can hardly be said to have any Greek predecessors, though a similar feeling does influence the actions of Neoptolemus in the *Philoctetes* and of the Peasant in the *Electra* of Euripides. But the characteristic which the Greeks admired, as Wagner admires sympathy, is moderation (*σωφροσύνη*). Practically all their dramas bear witness to its balanced and desirable beauty, even if only in the negative way of showing the horrors that attend its opposite, unbridled arrogance (*ὑβρις*). The centuries that separated Wagner from the Greeks brought a change in religion, which had its effect on human ideals. The Greek tragedians wrote for a people which believed that the man who offered each god due service, and violated no law or custom, would be favored by all gods in return. Orderliness and refraining from excess would produce the most satisfactory life, in the end, for the individual. Wagner, unorthodox as he was, was influenced by the Christian ideal of self-sacrifice, accepted for centuries by the world for which he wrote. As the Greek tragic poets were constantly showing how insolent pride (*ὑβρις*) brought destruction on the man who flaunted it, so Wagner shows how greed (for gold or for power) destroys those who harbor it; and as the Greeks exalt the virtues of moderation and self-control (both included in *σωφροσύνη*), so Wagner exalts the love that rises from sympathy and leads to forgetfulness of self in the service of others. Only one of

<sup>1</sup> *Tristan and Isolde* is a possible exception, though the sympathy that led Isolde to heal the wound of the enemy she had wished to kill, and Tristan's loyalty to King Mark, which made him choose to die rather than attempt flight with Isolde, should not be ignored.

Wagner's dramas, and only one of the Greek tragedies that have come down to us, has an historical subject. The mastersingers of Nuremberg and the Persian hosts had probably nothing in common beyond their worship at the altar of the god, Self-importance. Both subjects, however, gave an opportunity of representing within the limits of history the working out of ideas generally best embodied in a mythical plot. There is no more overwhelming picture of ruin caused by *ἵβρις* than in the *Persae*, and no more beautiful presentation of self-forgetting service than in the character of Hans Sachs. In representing the customs of Nuremberg Wagner is historical, as Aeschylus is in describing the battle of Salamis, but the greater part of each drama is interpretation. Both subjects also give the writer a chance to praise his country — Aeschylus for achievements in war, Wagner for achievements in song.

Aiming at interpretation rather than portraiture of life, Wagner's dramas, like the Greek, are made up of long scenes, generally between two or three characters who impress us as types rather than individuals. Far from being mere personifications of abstract qualities, they pass through bitter agony and wildest ecstasy, yet convey a suggestion of universality. We watch Siegfried forging the sword, and we are conscious of more than the son of Siegmund, working at the anvil in a cave. We are conscious of the swelling vigor of all the youth in the world, rising as sap rises in spring to make the forest astir with life. We see Wotan bid Brünnhilde farewell, and we are brought into touch with the yearning sorrow of all parents who must let the children they would shelter go out to meet life's dangers alone. We look upon Brünnhilde lifting the torch that will fire *Walhall*, or Parsifal raising the Holy Grail, and we realize how those have suffered who help mankind. Wagner's characters, like the Greek tragic figures — and also like the Greek statues — are more

than replicas of individual human models. The essence of countless experiences of a certain kind seems to have been distilled, and, after being separated from the foreign substances with which it had been accidentally mixed, poured into a large flask, through whose clear glass we see the pure color, with its beauty or ugliness enhanced by the shape that holds it. So we see the tender glow of a daughter's love for her stricken father through the forms of Antigone in the *Oedipus at Colonus* and Brünnhilde in Act II of the *Walküre*; the death-dealing blackness of hatred through the Clytemnestra of Aeschylus and the Ortrud of Wagner; the perfect clarity of youthful innocence in Ion and in Elsa; the rich warmth of manly sympathy in Theseus (both in the *Oedipus at Colonus* of Sophocles and in the *Heracles* of Euripides) and in Hans Sachs; the unquenchable flame of courage in Prometheus and in Siegfried.

The suggestion of universality is heightened in Wagner's dramas by the music, and in the Greek plays by the choral odes. Wagner's orchestra, unlike the orchestras of earlier opera composers, assumed many of the functions of the Greek Chorus, and Wagner himself was the first to call attention to this. He probably never thought of a Greek ode while composing, but he soon recognized that it was through the musical band (in ancient Athens, the Chorus; in our day, the orchestra) that the significance of a drama could be indicated with the most convincing beauty. A comparison of passages from his scores with some choral odes is interesting as showing how similar effects can be produced by two forms of artistic expression, both of which reach the mind through the ear, but appeal to it in very different ways. It would be possible for an unmusical person — provided he were a classicist — to gain, by just such a comparison, a real understanding of what the orchestra contributes to Wagner's works.

Wagner's liking for a quiet orchestral ending may have

sprung from his appreciation of such conclusions as those of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and the *Antigone*. The first one he wrote comes at the close of *Tristan and Isolde*, which was the first drama finished after his study of Greek tragedy. The *Walküre*, *Götterdämmerung* and *Parsifal* also conclude with music that floats gently into silence, leaving us to come back to ourselves with a sigh, instead of a jolt.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE "ORESTEIA" AND "THE RING OF THE NIBELUNG": DRAMAS OF CRIME AND ATONEMENT

#### I

How deep an impression the *Oresteia* made on Wagner's imagination we have already seen.<sup>1</sup> It is hardly surprising, then, to find him calling his longest work a trilogy. In reality, *The Ring of the Nibelung* has four parts; but the first part is entitled, "The Rhinegold. Prelude to the Trilogy — The Ring of the Nibelung," and those that follow are respectively "First, Second, and Third Day of the Trilogy."

In extent and in seriousness of purpose, the *Ring* and the *Oresteia* are similar. Both embody conceptions of right and wrong, involving the subordination of primitive human impulses to the dictates of a higher law. They are dramas of conflict, ending in reconciliation, and suggesting the continuance of its blessing in the lives of the spectators.

Complex as the *Ring* is, every step in the progress of the action emphasizes the idea that greed causes suffering and leads to ruin, while joy is attained only through love and loving sacrifice of self. As Wagner exalts love in its noblest form, so Aeschylus exalts the highest form of justice. Justice that lets no wrong go unpunished, and yet tempers the penalty by careful weighing of the motive, is evidently guided by *σωφροσύνη*, and becomes the ideal of the enlightened Greeks. The more primitive conception of justice, which considered the deed without reference to the motive, is represented by Clytemnestra and the Erinyes, and the more primitive idea

<sup>1</sup> p. 3.



of love as the longing to acquire, rather than to give, is represented by Wotan in *Rheingold* and *Walküre*. Wotan puts aside love, to indulge his personal ambition, and by so doing ruins himself and the gods. His child, Brünnhilde, sacrifices all in order to be true to it, with the result that greed is overthrown and the world redeemed. Similarly, Clytemnestra violates justice to consummate her desire, and thus brings death to herself and Aegisthus; while Orestes, by obeying the just dictates of Apollo, becomes an agent in the subduing of the powers of darkness and the establishment of a higher justice on earth.

In *Rheingold*, we find Wotan already king of the gods. On his spear he has cut the laws of compact, by which the world is ruled. To assure his supremacy, Wotan wants an impregnable fortress. The gods cannot build it, for their power is of the mind and spirit, and the piling of stones can be accomplished only by the giants. These agree to build the castle, if Wotan will surrender to them as payment Freia, goddess of love. Wotan, confident that he can get them to accept some other recompense when the time comes, sends Loge to find it. But Loge discovers, in all the world, only one creature who will take a substitute for love. Alberich, the Nibelung, has already renounced love, in order to make a bit of gold, stolen from the Rhine, into a magic ring, which will win the whole earth for its owner. The giants declare that they will take either Alberich's treasure, or Freia, but one of the two they must have. Wotan disgraces his godhood by robbing Alberich to save Freia and buy the castle, that he now names *Walhall*.<sup>1</sup> The *Rheingold* ends with a display of pomp. The gods march over a rainbow bridge to their fortress, resplendent in the sunset. To the eye they appear secure, as Clytemnestra does when she enters her palace with Aegisthus; but here, also, the coming retribution has cast its shadow before. As

<sup>1</sup> This form of the name is used by Wagner.

the prophetess, Cassandra, in the *Agamemnon* (1279 ff.) has foretold Clytemnestra's death, so Erda has risen from the heart of the earth to warn Wotan; and as the Chorus refers to the coming of Orestes, the avenger (1667), and says to Aegisthus (1669), "Go on, grow fat polluting justice, since you can," so at the end of *Rheingold*, Loge foretells the downfall of the gods, while the last words (sung by the Rhinemaidens in the river below) are: "False and afraid are the beings who flaunt their power above."

In both dramas there was a partial excuse for the crime. Agamemnon was not innocent, and even the Chorus, opposed to Clytemnestra as they are, cannot approve the deeds to which ambition led him (228-237 and 790 ff.). It was right that Agamemnon should suffer, but it was wrong for Clytemnestra to kill him as she did. It was equally right that the gold should be taken from Alberich. He had stolen it from the Rhine, and was planning to use it for evil. The wrong was in Wotan's motive, as it was in Clytemnestra's. He never intended to restore the gold to the Rhine. Instead, he used it to buy the castle his ambition craved; so he became subject to the curse, which abides in the ring, as the *ἀλάστωρ* in the house of Atreus, and destroys everyone whose hand seizes it.

The *Walküre* shows how Wotan pays the penalty for the crime committed in *Rheingold*. Its central idea is indicated in the words of the despairing god himself (Act II): "I laid hands on Alberich's ring, greedily grasped the gold! Of the curse that I fled I feel the clutch. Whatever I love, I must lose, I must kill whatever I care for, deceiving, betraying him who trusted me."

He is aware of the connection of the suffering with the crime, as Clytemnestra is (*Choë*. 888): "By guile I shall be slain, even as I slew." The same idea is expressed even more forcibly by Orestes (923): "On thyself thou, not I, wilt bring

death." The retribution for Wotan's crime, however, is but half completed when he makes the lament quoted. Then he has been forced to command the death of his only son. With the purpose of bringing into being a hero who could restore the ring, Wotan had married a mortal, and their son, Siegmund, had been destined, in the god's belief, to redeem the world from the curse of greed. His death is also the death of Wotan's plan for atonement. It is Fricka, goddess of custom, who makes him consent to this; and in yielding to her, Wotan again violates love, in order to maintain the supremacy of the gods. But his daughter, Brünnhilde, is unable to follow his example. She tries to protect Siegmund, and so loses her godhood, and separates herself from Wotan forever. Thus the god discovers that the penalty for his greed is the loss of the children he loves.

Up to this point, the psychological side of the drama is comparatively simple. Like Clytemnestra, Wotan sinned and met punishment, in which his own child was an agent. The child's motive was right, where the parent's had been wrong, but the child's act, viewed without regard to the motive, was a violation of the holiest traditions. In opposing Wotan, Brünnhilde defies not only the god whose will rules the world, but also the father whose love has given her everything. As Clytemnestra appeals to Orestes by emphasizing the claim of her motherhood, causing him to doubt, for a moment, the justice of his act (896-899), so Wotan cries: "Hearest thou, Brünnhilde? Thou whose breastplate, helmet and weapons, heart-winning ways, name and life, are all my gift?" Brünnhilde feels that she has done wrong to oppose him, and also that she has done right in fighting for Siegmund. So the psychological conflict begins, which, like that in the soul of Orestes, does not end until the close of the drama, when the two warring elements become reconciled.

The last two divisions of the *Ring*, taken together, form a

drama of reconciliation parallel to the *Eumenides*. In *Siegfried*, Wotan realizes that Brünnhilde, through her defiance, will accomplish his wish — the restoration of the ring. In *Götterdämmerung*, Brünnhilde comes to understand what she had always felt — that in being true to love she is not thwarting, but fulfilling Wotan's desire. Through this reconciliation the purpose of both is accomplished — the conquest of greed by love. The result of the impressive reconciliation at the close of the *Oresteia* is similar. True justice — the aim of the *Eumenides* and of their victim — is established.

How far one may go in analyzing the *Ring* and the *Oresteia* and still continue to find points of resemblance is indicated in the comparison that follows. Probably Wagner did not know that the parallel was so close; but, on the other hand, we cannot tell how differently he might have constructed his drama, if he had not read and responded to the *Oresteia* so enthusiastically.

## II

### SCENE IV of *Rheingold* and The Conclusion of the *Agamemnon*

In the final scene of *Rheingold*, as in the conclusion of the *Agamemnon*, the first great crime in the tragedy has been committed, and the criminal enjoys his hour of triumph. But the audience realizes the moral aspect of the situation to which he remains blind; for the dramatist subordinates the visible to the spiritual situation in such a way that every circumstance of triumph becomes an omen of approaching ruin.

While Wotan, regardless of his sin in the moment of victory, is not unlike Clytemnestra, we can find no corresponding resemblance between their victims. Both of these, however, have been entrapped by flattery (*Ag.* 905 ff. and *Rheingold*, Scene III), and the mask assumed to deceive them is thrown

off at the beginning of the final scene. Wotan says: "Captive thou art, I hold thee bound, caught as thou wert dreaming that all the world had come under thy power." Wotan's attitude is like Clytemnestra's (1372-1373): "Much that was said before to serve my purpose I shall contradict without the slightest shame." The way in which the crime was committed is then described by Aeschylus through the mouth of Clytemnestra, but represented by Wagner on the stage. It is completed when Wotan pulls the ring from Alberich's hand:

*Alb. (with a hideous shriek).* Woe is me, broken and crushed, of the wretched the wretchedest slave!

*Wot. (has put the ring on his finger and looks at it with satisfaction).* Now I hold what exalts me, of the mighty the mightiest lord!"

A similarly close connection between the victim's misery and the victor's satisfaction is expressed in vv. 1389-1392. Wotan, after he has secured the ring, is indifferent to Alberich and his threats. Asked by Loge if he has listened to them, Wotan, lost in contemplation of the ring, answers, "Let him enjoy his sputtering spleen!" So Clytemnestra, having gained her purpose, is indifferent to the opinion of the Chorus (1393-1394 and 1403-1404): "Since these things are, ye revered elders of Argos, rejoice, if you like; as for me, I exult. . . . Whether thou wilt praise or blame me, it is all the same."

The suggestion of the consequences of the crime is then made by the orchestra in *Rheingold*, by the Chorus in the *Agamemnon* (1410-1411). A musical effect of some grandeur accompanies Wotan's words, "Of the mighty the mightiest lord!" but the *Ring* motive follows immediately, destroying, with its introduction of the diminished seventh, the impression of stability given by the preceding harmonies. Whenever the ring changes hands, the new owner's gain involves

the former owner's loss, but it is only the idea of loss that receives expression in the *Ring* motive. It was the Rhine-maidens' loss that we felt when the motive made its first appearance in the score, after Alberich had stolen the gold; and this original association, added to the harmonic character of the motive itself, makes it always ominous. He who has wrested the ring from another will have it wrested from him in turn.

Even before taking the ring, Wotan has justified his action, as Clytemnestra does (1412 ff. and 1497 ff.), by pointing out that his victim is far from blameless. Like Clytemnestra, he ignores the fact that his selfish motive makes it impossible for him to be considered merely the instrument of justice.

His infatuation is evident in his scorn for the curse uttered by Alberich. The fact that the Nibelung himself has already paid for seizing the gold, by exactly such suffering as he now calls down on Wotan's head, intensifies the ominous significance of his imprecations for the audience, but has not the slightest effect on the god. Equally significant to us, and unimportant to Clytemnestra, are the Chorus's lines (1426-1430): "In dishonor, bereft of friends, thou shalt yet be stricken down as thou didst strike," of which the last two point directly to Clytemnestra's death and to *Choëphoroi* 888: "By guile I shall be slain, even as I slew," as Alberich's words anticipate the moment in the *Walküre* when Wotan, suffering for the crime he now ignores, says: "Of the curse that I fled I feel the clutch." But in *Rheingold* he has no fear of such suffering, and for defence against any whose hatred he may have incurred he relies on his fortress, an external aid which would be useless as protection against moral law, and for which Wotan has really committed the crime from whose results he expects it to save him. Parallel to this is Clytemnestra's relation to Aegisthus, on whom she now relies.

The reference to a higher power, to which even the evil force so active in the drama (the curse of greed in *Rheingold* — in the *Agamemnon*, the δαίμων, v. 1468) is subservient, gives us a most impressive passage in *Rheingold*, as in the *Agamemnon*. With Erda's appearance, and the marvellous music in voice and orchestra that distinguishes this part of the score, our thoughts are turned, for the time, from the ignoble acts we have been watching to something greater — to the changeless source of all the changing life of earth, holding in its unfathomable mystery the resolution of the discords that rend the world. Gods and giants become insignificant, as the *Nature* motive flows from the orchestra, and Erda sings. A similar turning of our attention from the crime that we have been contemplating to the divine plan, in which all things serve a purpose, is effected by vv. 1485-1488. This *motif* appeared before in the first lyric passage of the drama (160 ff.) as the *Nature* motive appeared in the *Vorspiel* to *Rheingold*.

In *Rheingold*, when the crime is past, the curse of greed, with the destruction that follows in its wake, is still kept before our minds by the quarrel of the giants and the murder of Fasolt. In the *Agamemnon* an old crime is recalled in order that the horrible persistence of the δαίμων may be fully realized (1468-1471).

The lament, essentially lyric in character, of the Rhine-maidens for their lost gold, introduces an element such as is supplied by the ἐφύμνιον (1489-1496 and 1513-1520). It serves also to recall the mind from the moral aspects of the situation to the concrete object on which the crime has been perpetrated. It begins with the cry "Rheingold!" as the chorus begins (1489), "O king!" It concludes with a reference to the perpetration of the crime, "False and afraid are the beings who flaunt their power above," as does the ἐφύμνιον (1495-1496), "Subdued by a treacherous destruction with the two-edged weapon in the hand of a wife."

The link that connects the close of *Rheingold* with the beginning of the *Walküre* is in the orchestra. The *Donner* motive, with the call, "Heda!" appears again in measures 73-95 of the *Walküre* Vorspiel. Similarly an echo of ἄχαριν χάριν (Ag. 545) is found in χάριν ἀχάριτον (Choë. 42). As the emotional storm that rages from beginning to end of *Walküre* is anticipated by the actual storm in *Rheingold*, the *Choëphoroi* is anticipated by *Agamemnon* 1541-1550.

To the last lyric utterance of the Chorus in the *Agamemnon* we can find parallels — mainly in the orchestral part — in *Rheingold*. *Walhall*, gilded by the sunset, is glorious in the eyes of the gods, but so was the hoard of treasure in the eyes of Alberich. Both were purchased with stolen gold, as the *Ring* motive following the *Walhall* motive reminds us, when Wotan sings, "Abendlich strahlt," etc. We might well say of the situation in *Rheingold*, δόσµαχα δ' ἔστι κρῖναι (Ag. 1561). The robber Alberich has been robbed (cf. Ag. 1562, φέρει φέροντ'; ἐκτίνει δ' ὁ καίνων). Wotan also has become a robber, and the *Nature* motive, that follows the *Ring* motive while Wotan is silent, brings to mind again the law that is stronger than Wotan and *Walhall*, that cannot leave his sin unpunished any more than Alberich's (cf. Ag. 1563-1564, "The law holds, while Zeus holds his throne, that the sinner must suffer. Thus it is ordained").

Wotan's trials have brought about in him a moral change, incomplete, but important and such as Clytemnestra never experiences. It makes him determine to right the wrong he has done. He stands "as though seized with a great idea," while we hear in the orchestra the *Sword* motive. Wotan raises a sword, but the weapon is only the visible, as the motive is the audible symbol of his purpose. For although the sword and the motive are closely associated in the *Walküre* and *Siegfried*, one of the most significant appearances of the phrase occurs when the sword is neither in sight nor in mind. It



is when greed, embodied in Hagen, is conquered, unable to take the ring from the hand of the dead Siegfried. By the *Sword* motive, that episode so near the end of the *Götterdämmerung* is connected with this passage in *Rheingold*. And in a similar way *Agamemnon* 1565, "Who might cast the tribe of curses from the house?" anticipates the *Eumenides*, and may be connected with *Eumenides* 754-761, "O Pallas, thou who hast delivered my house."

As the *Rheingold* draws to a close, the centre of the stage is occupied no longer by Wotan, but by *Walhall*. To gain and hold this fortress Wotan has committed the crime out of which other and more horrible crimes are to grow. Wotan's crime bears much the same relation to *Walhall* as Clytemnestra's does to Aegisthus, who occupies the foreground in the *ἐπίλογος* of the *Agamemnon*. It is on *Walhall*, that Wotan relies as a defence against all who might question his past action or his future right to rule. Clytemnestra's reliance on Aegisthus is similar (1434-1437). The stolen ring made from stolen gold was the price paid for *Walhall*, but the connection between them is closer than that. The ring was the tool and the symbol of Alberich's greed — what is *Walhall* but the tool and the symbol of Wotan's? Each motive (in its usual form) fills two measures, and in the first of these two measures the rhythm of both is identical. Now the *Walhall* motive is followed by the *Ring* motive, which accompanies Loge's words, "To their end they hasten, they who think themselves strong and secure." Aegisthus, when he enters at the close of the *κομμός*, makes a transient impression of power. His attendants (1650) are about him, and he speaks of the revolting crime of Atreus in a way that makes us feel that no penalty exacted for it could be too great. His weakness, however, becomes apparent, first in the *ὑβρις* of vv. 1604-1611, and thereafter in the rising anger with which he answers the taunts of the Chorus. Before Clytemnestra pro-

nounces the last words, we realize that the support on which she depends, too closely involved in her own guilt to be of any avail, is doomed to perish with her. This is suggested by the Chorus (1646-1648): "Is Orestes alive, that he may return hither and, with fortune's aid, vanquish and slay them both?" as the destruction of Wotan and his castle is foreseen by Loge.

### III

#### The *Choëphoroi* and the *Ring*

The *Walküre* begins with Wotan's effort to atone for the wrong that he has done. It is not repentance, however, that prompts him, but fear, as is evident from his revelations to Brünnhilde in Act II. His attempt is to avert "what the earth-goddess made me fear — a shameful end of the immortals." It is not unlike the fear that moves Clytemnestra to order the propitiatory libations to Agamemnon (*Choë.* 32-33), "piercing, hair-raising fear, coming to the house in dreams as a prophet of evil." Neither Clytemnestra nor Wotan would have made such attempts if their fear had not been roused by warnings, terrifying because of their partial obscurity and their supernatural origin. Wotan's warning followed his crime immediately, and the reparation he planned required many years, but all this makes his attempt no less futile than Clytemnestra's. If Siegmund, after finding Wotan's sword, had lived to kill Fafner and given the ring back to the Rhine, who but the god, blinded by his love of power, could then think that his crime was as though it had never been? As long as Wotan lives in the castle bought by the ring, the stain of guilt remains on him, as it must always remain on Clytemnestra (*Choë.* 48). His endeavor to bring about through Siegmund the incomplete reparation which is all he considers necessary leads to the revolt of Brünnhilde and so to the complete reparation, involving the fall of the gods. In a

similar way, the sending out of libation-pourers by Clytemnestra to appease the spirit of Agamemnon brings about the meeting of Orestes and Electra, furthering the real appeasement through Clytemnestra's death.

There is even a recognition-scene between brother and sister to make the first act of the *Walküre* more like the beginning of the *Choëphoroi*. The relation of the characters to the central idea in the two dramas is not the same, for here it is not Brünnhilde, but Siegmund, who becomes the counterpart of Orestes. The scene is noteworthy, however, both as an instance of parallel dramatic construction occurring in the same relative place in the development of the plot, and as the only *ἀναγνώρισις* in Wagner. Here, also, it is the sister who recognizes the brother, and to whom the recognition means more. The first two steps toward recognition Sieglinde takes alone, as Electra does when examining the lock of hair and the footprints. It is by Siegmund's resemblance to herself that she is surprised: "ein Wunder will mich gemahnen," etc. The third step is taken only with Siegmund's aid. His revelation of his father's name is parallel to the production of the mantle by Orestes, and calls forth an outburst of joy similar to vv. 235-237. Both Siegmund and Orestes have come to claim their heritage, Siegmund his father's sword, and Orestes his father's kingdom.

In the beginning of the *Walküre* Wagner, for the first time in the *Ring*, introduces characters that win our sympathy. Wotan's failings and Alberich's vindictiveness are so obvious that it is impossible ever to forget that their sufferings are deserved. With Siegmund and Sieglinde it is different. Acting from generous impulses, but constantly misunderstood, innocently suffering for Wotan's sin, they gain our sympathy at once. So in the first half of the *Choëphoroi* all is calculated to enlist our sympathy for Orestes. An earlier introduction of the murder might have left the audience, as it would

surely leave the modern reader, in the same frame of mind as at the end of the *Agamemnon* — admitting the justice of the deed, but repelled by the perpetrator. Aeschylus creates a different attitude by emphasizing the suffering of Electra and Orestes, deprived through a parent's sin of their rightful heritage (*Choë*. 130–137, 249–254, 332–339, 407–409, 444–449). The appeal to our sympathy in the *Choëphoroi*, as in the *Walküre*, is enhanced by introducing the pathetic figure of the sister, seen first in a state of enforced subjection to those she cannot love (*Choë*. 132–135).

When Brünnhilde, in the second act of the *Walküre*, disobeys Wotan and defends Siegmund, her action produces a deflection of the drama's course much like that effected by the murder of Clytemnestra. Up to this point the motive power behind every act, even Sieglinde's escape with Siegmund, has been personal desire, but Brünnhilde's resolution grows out of the purest unselfishness. The moral force here acting through her — that of unselfish love — is to prevail in the end of the drama, as the cause of Orestes is to be vindicated in the *Eumenides*. In the *Choëphoroi*, Orestes appears less as a murderer than as the agent through whom Clytemnestra's crime is punished. He commits the murder at Apollo's command and under threat of penalties indescribably horrible if he should fail to obey. He is the first of the many murderers in the family of the Pelopidae whose motives are not utterly base. Self-interest is not absent, it is true (*καὶ πρὸς πλείει χρημάτων ἀχηνία*, 301), but it leads Orestes to seek not, like his forerunners, the possessions of another, but his own rightful heritage. His motive, like Brünnhilde's, is far higher than that of the parent he opposes, and his victory, like hers, proves to be incomplete; and when her suffering begins, with her capture by Siegfried in the guise of Gunther, her state of mind is not unlike that of Orestes when he first sees the Erinyes (*Choë*. 1048–1050 and 1054).

It is noteworthy that Brünnhilde, like Wotan, acts on impulse, and learns, only after much suffering, to understand the full significance of her act and the feelings behind it, while both Orestes and Clytemnestra make elaborate plans, and commit the murders with eyes open to the extent of the crime. They see themselves and their opponents in the clear light of a Greek sun, while Wotan and Brünnhilde, dashing through the mist of the North, mistake foe for friend and friend for foe until too late. Nothing could be farther from Brünnhilde's thoughts when she defends Siegmund than the fact that she is thus preparing the way for the god's downfall. The cause and excuse for her act is love. In the oracle of Apollo, Aeschylus gives Orestes more obvious support. This is part of the clearer outlining of issues throughout the *Oresteia*. The real difference, however, lies rather in the means used to define the situation than in the situation itself. Aeschylus shows that Orestes obeys, as Clytemnestra did not, a pure and just power; and he represents it under one of the forms that represented it in Greek religion — the oracle at Delphi. Wagner represents what Brünnhilde obeys, and what he considered the highest motive power in the world, not through any intermediate symbol, but simply by its effect on her character and action. She justifies her cause by referring to the love for Siegmund taught her by Wotan, as Orestes refers to Apollo's prophecy. Relying on it beforehand, she answers Wotan's command that she cause Siegmund's death with the same confidence that rings in the reply of Orestes to the fear of the Chorus that someone might overhear and betray him to Clytemnestra (269-270). Afterward she defends her act by referring to it (*Walküre*, Act III, "Die im Kampfe Wotan," etc.), as Orestes, after the crime, proclaims (1026-1033), *ὥς δ' ἔτ' ἰμφρων, κτλ.*

## IV

The *Eumenides* and the *Ring*

The *Götterdämmerung* opens with the scene of the Norns, who, like the Pythian priestess in the beginning of the *Eumenides*, appear only once. The scene does not advance the action, but rouses a vague dread, which grows later into a definite fear. Without the Norn scene, which is unfortunately often omitted in performances, the *Götterdämmerung* would begin with sunrise on the mountain-top, with Brünnhilde's ecstatic farewell to Siegfried. There is no hint, in this second scene of the *Götterdämmerung* Prologue, of the tragic struggle about to begin. It inspires confidence and looks forward to victory, like the first words of Apollo to Orestes (*Eum.* 64-66). Had Aeschylus made this the beginning of the *Eumenides*, our first impressions would have been quite different, although even here the strength of the enemy is tacitly recognized, while Brünnhilde and Siegfried are unconscious of any enemy's existence. Like the Erinyes, Hagen, the vindictive figure that dominates *Götterdämmerung* has not yet been brought on the stage, but his coming has been prophesied by Wotan in *Walküre*, Act II ("Jetzt versteh' ich den stummen Sinn — den Freien erlang ich mir nie"). This passage, however, will not bear comparison with the preparation for the appearance of the Erinyes which comes at the end of the *Choëphoroi* (1048-1061) and is in itself a powerful dramatic moment. The Norn scene, on the other hand, is in no way inferior to the opening of the *Eumenides*. In the spinning of the rope of fate we behold a ritual producing the impression of eternal continuity. To an audience brought under the domination of this impression the sudden breaking of the rope is a terrific shock. Woven in with its threads, the curse of greed has eaten through them — we cannot expect anything to escape from such destructive power.

The individuality of the priestess, like that of the Norns, has been lost in her office. Formal calm pervades the invocation emphasizing the dignity of the oracle and the maintenance of law and order throughout its history (vv. 5, 7, 12, 15, 17-18). This enhances the startling effect of her terror at finding the holy spot profaned by loathsome creatures. The mere sight of them asleep drives her cowering from her rightful place — how, then, can we expect Orestes to survive the horror of their active pursuit? The effect that Aeschylus produces by a few lines of description, 46-56, Wagner produces by suggestion of the vaguest sort. Through the eyes of the priestess, Aeschylus gives us our first glimpse of the hideous band in the temple, while Wagner shrouds in mysterious gloom the form of the evil that he makes us fear. We have noted such differences before.

The last words of the priestess (60-64) indicate the shifting of the scene from the plane of mortal to that of celestial activity. In the *Agamemnon* the course of events was directed by the will of Clytemnestra; in the *Choëphoroi* the characters are mortals, but the controlling power is the oracle of Apollo. In the *Eumenides*, however, though it deals primarily with the fate of Orestes, the active characters — Apollo, Athene, and the Erinyes — are all superhuman. A similar shifting — though in the opposite direction — takes place in the *Ring*. In the *Rheingold* no mortal appears; they enter the drama with the opening of the *Walküre*, where they begin at once, though unconsciously, to thwart the gods. In the *Götterdämmerung* every leading character is at least half human, and it is their action that decides the fate of the gods and the world. It is to this change that the end of the Norn scene points.

In the *Eumenides*, clouds, darkly threatening, seem to gather as the priestess speaks (34-63), but before the storm breaks (130) the sun looks between them for a moment

(64-93), and in its brilliant strength we read the promise of clearer days to come. Apollo, whom Orestes obeyed, stands before us in his own temple, guarding and promising to guard forever his faithful follower. The preceding scene had closed with the intimation that it would be left to Apollo to cope with the Erinyes, and his first words (64-67) show him ready to undertake the responsibility and confident of success. He does not underestimate the foe, but he sees the road to ultimate victory (74-75 and 78-84).

A similar effect is produced by the transition to the scene between Siegfried and Brünnhilde. In the darkest hour of night the Norns sink into the yawning earth, leaving behind them the curse that neither the spear of the god nor the threads of fate could withstand. We are waiting to see it move upon its next victim, when Wagner flashes before our eyes the light that is finally to dispel its gloom. The second scene of the *Prologue* is a symphonic paean of love. The rising sun shines on the mountain, as Brünnhilde bids farewell to the hero whom she sends "to new deeds." These words, like Apollo's "I will not abandon thee," are significant. The only characters in the *Ring* who achieve "deeds," in the highest sense of the word, are Siegfried and Brünnhilde. The tremendous task of combating the power of greed has been left to them by Wotan (*Sf.* III, 1). The end of the Norns' weaving is only a second indication that the fall of the gods — first signalized by the breaking of Wotan's spear — is at hand. The old order is at an end, and the Norns' last words characterize it: "To the world the wise prophesy no more." Where Wotan has talked, Brünnhilde acts. His prophecies are no longer needed, but her "world-redeeming deed" is. When Brünnhilde says "To new deeds," she is thinking of deeds to be performed by Siegfried, but the words are sung to the *Brünnhilde* motive.

After inspiring dread of the Erinyes by the priestess's mono-



logue, and showing us in Apollo the power that is to prove stronger than they, Aeschylus wakens them before our eyes. Wagner, following the same order in the *Prologue*, rouses forebodings by the Norn-scene, then paints for us, in the most luminous colors of his orchestral palette, the love that is finally to prevail over the evil forces of the drama, and after that, in Scene I of Act I, he brings before us the character in which our forebodings and the evil forces culminate — Hagen. In Hagen the curse of greed, whose devastating course we have watched in the earlier parts of the drama, is given bodily form. This curse has been represented previously only in the orchestra, by the *Curse* motive; in the *Götterdämmerung* Wagner puts it on the stage as well. The Erinyes are a similar personification of the force which Aeschylus has shown us at work in the *Agamemnon* and the *Choëphoroi* — the force which brings upon the murderer punishment horrible and inevitable. Hitherto our attention has been called to this force chiefly by the words of the Chorus, who present the idea to us (as the orchestra in the *Ring* presents the idea of the curse of greed) in various connections: when they anticipate the death Agamemnon is to suffer as penalty for the slaughter of Iphigenia — either in vague expressions (*Ag.* 154–155, 250–251), or more definitely, as in 461–468, where the word Erinyes is noteworthy, and in 1335–1342 — and when they anticipate the similar penalty to be paid by Clytemnestra (*Choë.* 66–70, 312–314, 400–404, 649–651). That the Erinyes in the *Eumenides* are the embodiment of this power is evident at once, and is confirmed by such passages as *Eumenides*, 261–268, 316–320, 354–359. Hagen, who is incapable of feeling anything but greed and hatred, and the Erinyes, who drain the murderer's life-blood, are by their nature forever set apart from associates. When Siegfried asks Hagen why he does not join in the oath of blood-brotherhood, he answers, "My blood would defile your drink!

It flows not pure and noble like yours, but cold and benumbed it curdles in me; it will not bring red to my cheek," and in Act II he says, "Old in my youth, sallow and pale, I hate the happy, I never am glad." His strange pallor and ungainliness make him appear less than human, but this is insignificant compared with the "makeup" of the Erinyes, if it approached, even remotely, the picture Aeschylus paints. They are set apart from all other immortals, as Hagen is from mortals (68-73): "Asleep they lie, the loathsome maidens, grey and aged, with whom no god associates, nor man, nor beast; for evil, they came into being, and in evil darkness they dwell, in Tartarus under the earth, things hateful to men and to gods Olympian." Compare also 190-193, and 349-352: "At birth this lot was put upon us, from immortals to keep our hands afar, and there is none that shares our feasts as a friend."

What Alberich could not accomplish has become Hagen's task — the recovery of the ring and the destruction of Wotan and Siegfried — and the brief scene at the opening of the second act, where Alberich tries to urge his son on, recalls at times the speech with which Clytemnestra attempts to rouse the sleeping Erinyes. The scene begins:

*"(Hagen, with spear in hand and shield at his side, sits sleeping by the castle entrance. The moon suddenly throws a glaring light on him and his surroundings; Alberich is seen in front of Hagen, leaning his arms on Hagen's knee.)"*

*Alb.* Sleepest thou, Hagen, my son? — Thou sleepest and hearest me not, whom rest and sleep betrayed?

*Hag.* *(speaks low, without moving, so that he seems to sleep on, though his eyes are open and staring).* I hear thee, wicked dwarf: what hast thou to say to my sleep?"

Clytemnestra's first lines are (94-95): "Ye would sleep, aha! — and what need is there of sleepers? So am I left by you

in dishonor." A little further on she expresses the idea found in Hagen's reply (*Eum.* 104), "In sleep the heart becomes clear-sighted." In Alberich's appeal, and in Clytemnestra's, two motives are developed—the speaker's claim to the listener's aid and the strength and apparent freedom of their enemies. Their only chance of success lies in unremitting endeavor.

While Alberich's part in this scene corresponds to that played by Clytemnestra's *ἄδωλον*, it is Wotan who has been her counterpart before. In character, however, he is fundamentally different. For Wotan comes at last to realize his sin, and to desire supremacy for what is best in the world, rather than for himself. Moreover, even in the beginning, when Wotan ordered the building of *Walhall*, his purpose reached beyond personal gratification. By means of the castle, Wotan aimed to make "eternal might" visible to a world that should bow before it, and the "might" was to be Wotan's own, it is true; but he also aimed to exalt "man's honor," and the nobility of character for which the phrase stood to him is expressed in the majestic chords of the *Walhall* motive. Such a combination of good and evil as Wagner has indicated in Wotan, Aeschylus indicates in the Erinyes. In so far as the Erinyes judge from external circumstances alone, and insist on inflicting the full penalty on one whose motives were blameless, their defeat is deserved; but in their better aspect, as *δαίμονες* who inspire the fear of wrongdoing, they are not to be disdained. In the splendid scene of reconciliation with which the *Eumenides* concludes, the Erinyes discard their revolting attributes, and, as beneficent deities, are led to their new shrine by the people of Attica. The *Ring* also ends in a reconciliation, by which the survivors, and the world they represent, are supposed to gain. The reconciliation is between Wotan's noblest aims and Brünnhilde's action, and is indicated in the score by the harmonious alternation

of the motives of *Walhall* and *Redemption by Love*. In *Siegfried*, Wotan casts off greed, and its evil power in *Götterdämmerung* is concentrated in Hagen, who, like the evil aspect of the Erinyes, pursues an innocent victim only to be overthrown in the end. In other words, Wagner has allotted separately to Wotan and to Hagen such qualities as are united in the Erinyes, and has united in Wotan a will, strong and supremely selfish, like Clytemnestra's, and an innate desire for the maintenance of right and justice, which corresponds to the better aspect of the Erinyes.

The remarkable effect produced by the conclusion of the *Eumenides* is partly due to the way in which Aeschylus extends the boundaries of his drama until the audience is, in a sense, included and made to feel that the final issue concerns them directly. When Wagner read the *Eumenides* he must have been impressed by this, and it may be that he was consciously influenced by it in writing the conclusions of his later works. The subjects do not, of course, permit of so close a connection with any locality or people as in the *Eumenides*, and even if they did, any emphasis of this aspect would lessen their interest for the international public to which modern opera appeals. It is true, however, that the endings of the *Ring*, *Meistersinger*, and *Parsifal*, like that of the *Eumenides*, create in the hearer a feeling that what marks the end of the drama also marks a possible beginning for himself. When the final scene of the *Götterdämmerung* opens, Hagen's success has brought us into that hopeless mood in which nothing seems certain except destruction. With Siegfried dead and Brünnhilde captured, it appears that even the noblest natures are doomed to be crushed by the power of greed. Voicing this feeling, the motive of the *Fall of the Gods* descends in the orchestra as Brünnhilde enters. It is the phrase heard in *Rheingold*, just after Erda sang, "All that is — ends!" Now, as the first word comes from Brünnhilde's lips, the motive

suddenly turns and rises — it becomes the motive of growth (*Nature* motive), and it flows toward us with the same calm movement, the same suggestion of inexhaustible life that it had when we heard it at the opening of *Rheingold*. It makes us feel instinctively that something new and good will spring again from the earth laid waste by the curse of greed, and as we hear the motive with the first sound of Brünnhilde's voice, we look to her to tell us what this may be. It is to us that we expect her to reveal it, because there is no one on the stage who would desire or understand her message. Hagen would not, and the inmates of the Gibichung castle, who watch Brünnhilde in silence, are ignorant of the tragic series of events of which they are witnessing the conclusion. Their presence on the stage, however, saves Brünnhilde from appearing to commune with herself — which would be quite out of place at this point — and as they are men and women listening to Brünnhilde, they are a kind of representation of the audience, transferred to the scene and period of the drama, as the Chorus of *προσφυτοί* at the close of the *Eumenides* is a representation of Athenian citizens such as those who were originally looking on. It is impossible to hear Brünnhilde, after referring to the contradictions between the character and the experience of Siegfried, ask the question: "Know ye how that came to be?" and not feel that we are addressed; just as the Attic audience must have felt that they were referred to in the last line of Athene's promise to the Erinyes (804-807): "I promise in righteousness that ye shall have homes and secret sanctuaries in a righteous land, seats on shining thrones by the altars, and honor paid you by these townsfolk here." Brünnhilde recognizes the necessity for the suffering forced upon her: "Betrayed I had to be by the purest of heroes, that a woman be wise." So she acknowledges her submission to the law of experience which is emphasized throughout the *Oresteia*, and is expressed in the words which characterize Zeus as (*Ag.*

176-178) "him that put mortals on the road to wisdom, ordaining that knowledge should come by suffering." What Brünnhilde has learned — the answer to the expectations roused by the *Nature* motive at her entrance — is revealed by her action and by the music. The motive of *Redemption by Love* appears in the orchestra when Brünnhilde prepares to cast herself upon the blazing funeral pyre of Siegfried, and it rises with her excitement, each repetition beginning a semitone higher, until she leaps on her horse and gallops into the flames. Unlike the other motives equally important in the score, this one has not been heard often. It has appeared only once before, in the last act of the *Walküre*, when Sieglinde pays homage to Brünnhilde's generous love — and while this prevents it from seeming extraneous to the drama, the fact that it has not yet been worked out to its logical end (like, for instance, the motives of the *Sword* and the *Curse*) gives it the effect of a suggestion made to us personally. Greed, as a moving principle in life, has failed; love waits for us to give it a trial. We may perhaps find a similar suggestion in *Eumenides*, 990-995, "From these dread beings I see great good coming to you citizens here; if with grace in your hearts you tender these gracious spirits high honor forever, yours will be the glory of keeping both land and city wholly righteous in judgment." All through the *Oresteia* we have seen that the murderer cannot escape suffering for his crime (*Ag.* 462-466), and now, at the end, it is implied that if we, the audience, follow the opposite course to that taken by Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, we shall be blest as they were ruined. This beneficent aspect of the Erinyes has been touched upon already in *Eumenides*, 312-315 and 537-551, but, like the *Redemption* motive, it has not been developed in the drama. Its full significance is to become apparent to the townspeople of Pallas (1045), learning wisdom at last (1000), and is dramatically represented by the thrilling change in the attitude of the Chorus from

*Eumenides*, 810-817, to 916-917, 921-926. There is a convincing power in the way Aeschylus presents this idea which we are not surprised to find absent from Wagner's enunciation of the *Redemption* motive. Knowing the Athens of the fifth century, Aeschylus could make Athene say (853-854), "The rising tide of time will ever bring more honor to this people," and could confidently prophesy *τύχας ὀνησίμους* for the city; while Wagner could only suggest as a lovely, but remote ideal, the picture of a world delivered from selfishness.

## CHAPTER V

### THE CONCLUSION OF THE MEISTERSINGER AND THE CONCLUSION OF THE EUMENIDES: TWO REMARKABLE RECONCILIATIONS

THE reconciliation with which the *Meistersinger* concludes is even more like that of the Erinyes, though the issues involved are as far apart as ancient Athens and mediaeval Nuremberg. The maintenance of justice in human affairs and the maintenance of the art of song as an important element in human culture are aims widely different. Each, however, may be accepted by individuals or societies that hold contradictory views as to the means that should be used to attain it. Both the *Eumenides* and the *Meistersinger* portray the struggle between two such opposing parties, and end with their reconciliation. The representatives of the older and the younger generations come into conflict—the *γῆραι δαίμονες* with the *θεοὶ νεώτεροι*, and the mastersingers with Walter and his champion, Sachs. In each case, the former believe that their yielding would mean the loss to the world of all they have striven to maintain, and the latter look on their opponents with mingled scorn and fear, confident that the freedom they themselves demand is right. The *γῆραι δαίμονες* and the mastersingers try to uphold what is best, as they understand it, by compelling respect for a generally accepted principle. In the one case, it is a principle of right conduct, which the Erinyes defend by punishing all who violate it; and in the other, a principle of song composition, which the masters defend by excluding from their guild all who break its rules. Trouble results from their



inability to provide for the exceptional case. They fail to see that in certain extraordinary circumstances good laws may be overridden and yet no harm done. Such transgressions can be justified, but only, as a rule, by something not entirely under human control. The justification of Orestes comes from Apollo's oracle, and of Walter, from his own poetic inspiration. It is always an easy thing to win sympathy for an innocent and abused transgressor, and to arouse antipathy for his wilfully blind persecutors, and in most cases this is all that is attempted. But Wagner has followed Aeschylus in compelling us not to forget the usual in our consideration of the exceptional. Nothing is more natural—or more dangerous—than for the average person to feel that he is exceptional and entitled to receive such extraordinary consideration as he has seen accorded to some other case. It is this danger that is alluded to in *Eumenides*, 494–495, "This act will henceforth make all men ready to be reckless;" and in *Meistersinger*, Act I, "Sachs opens a way for bunglers, so that they may easily push in and out as they choose." It is averted in the conclusion of each. While justice demands freedom for Orestes and honor for Walter's talent, it also insists on recognition of the benefits still to be gained by respecting the laws that they broke. If Wagner had made the *Meistersinger* end with the crowning of Walter, as he might easily have done, and if Aeschylus had concluded the *Eumenides* with a few anapaests appended to v. 777, we should come away from both with a view decidedly limited compared with that which is given us in the truly magnificent endings as they now stand. The plot of the *Meistersinger* really ends with Walter's crowning, but by extending the *finale* Wagner has made the drama conclude not merely with the artistic victory of a Franconian knight over some Nuremberg burghers, but with a glorifying of song as the expression of what is best in the life and character of a people, and in a

declaration of the essential union of all who serve it, whether by their creative genius, like Walter, or by their conservative efforts, like the masters.

It is no small achievement to succeed, in the very end of a drama, in changing the listener's attitude from antagonism to admiration, without introducing something to prove the former attitude founded upon a misconception. Wagner, following Aeschylus, brings this about by enlarging our view of the subject as a whole.

5

## CHAPTER VI

### AJAX AND AMFORTAS: THE FALLEN HEROES

IN Wagner's *Parsifal* and the *Ajax* of Sophocles we see the effect on a noble character of the consciousness that he has shown himself lacking in the one quality in which he had been acknowledged supreme. Ajax, preëminent among the Greek chieftains for physical strength, at the very moment when he expected to prove it overwhelming has been diverted from his goal by madness, and disgraced himself by slaughtering flocks instead of the kings against whom he set out. In *Parsifal* Amfortas suffers a like humiliation. King of the knights who serve the Holy Grail, he had believed his moral strength invincible, and, relying on that, had gone forth to conquer Klingsor. But instead, he himself became the victim of a mad infatuation, so incurring disgrace whose stain cannot be removed, and whose outward sign is the wound that never heals. Neither hero is seen until after the act, and both have fallen through relying too exclusively on their own efforts. Amfortas was *allzukühn*, and Ajax was οὐ κατ' ἀνθρώπων φρονῶν (777).

In Wagner's adaptation of the legend, the Grail is the symbol of the love that yearns to deliver humanity from the burden of sorrow and pain. The Grail was intrusted by heavenly messengers to Titurel, who built a temple for it in the mountains, where he was joined by all who were ready to devote their lives to service. In his old age Titurel surrendered the throne to his son, Amfortas. Meanwhile, Klingsor, unable to conquer sin in himself and thereby win admittance to the sanctuary, resolved to drag back to his own level all who had

risen higher. He transformed the wilderness at the foot of the Grail mountain into a garden, and filled it with beings of alluring loveliness, at once flowers and maidens. Enticed by them, and by the captive Kundry, more than one of the Grail knights has been enslaved. Amfortas, eager to put an end to this, set forth, before the opening of the drama, for Klingsor's castle, carrying the sacred lance to dispel the magic. Then Kundry met him, and, dazed by her beauty, Amfortas forgot his mission; the lance slipped from his hand. Klingsor snatched it up, drove it into the side of its faithless guardian, and bore it away. Amfortas returned to the temple, to see daily the empty place where the lance was wont to lie beside the Grail and to realize that he, king of the knights, was the only guilty one among them.

Before we reach the tenth line of *Parsifal*, we learn that the king is ailing. Gurnemanz says, "It is time to await the king. I see the messengers approaching, who precede the litter on which his tortured frame is carried." Equally early in the *Ajax* we read (9-10): "Within his tent the hero is now, as it happens, with head dripping with sweat, and hands that have slain with the sword."

After we have heard that Amfortas suffers constantly, he is brought before us. He remains, for a brief scene, resting on a litter, and is carried away, not to appear again until Gurnemanz has given a complete account of the adventure in which the wound was received. The general plan of construction is the same as that adopted by Sophocles; for when Ajax's frenzy has been described by Athene, he enters bearing the *μάστιξ*, a visible evidence of his madness, as the litter is of the weakness of Amfortas. After a short scene (91-117), he withdraws, reappearing when the course of his madness has been fully detailed in the scene between Tecmessa and the Chorus (201-332). She is questioned as one whose relation to Ajax would make her a reliable informant (208-213),

and similarly Gurnemanz is led by the Grail squires to tell how their king came to be wounded. Like Tecmessa, though earlier in the drama, Gurnemanz laments the contrast between the former state of Amfortas and his present wretchedness. It is just before Amfortas's entrance that he says: "He draws near; they are bearing him. — Alas! How can my heart endure the sight of him, in the proud height of his manhood, the leader of the most victorious host, now become the slave of sickness?" words akin in sentiment to (203 ff.): "We have cause for our groans, we who grieve for the house of Telamon far away. For now Ajax, the dread, the mighty, the savage, in a turbid storm of madness lies sick."

Like Ajax, Amfortas longs for death. To him it is the "only blessing," as the *σκότος* of the nether world is *φάος* to Ajax (394). There is an equal intensity of emotion (though no verbal resemblance) in the lines that follow (Act III, Sc. II): "Let the terrible wound, let its poison die! Let the heart that it gnaws grow rigid," and (395 ff.): "O darkness of death, full of light as thou art to me, take me, take me to dwell in thee, O take me!"

In each case the contrast between the son's ruin and the father's success is indicated. Amfortas laments (Act III): "Ay, woe! woe! woe is me! I raise this cry gladly with you. More gladly still would I receive death from your hands, for my sin the mildest atonement. (*Turning to the dead Titurel*) My father, highly blest of heroes, the purest, to whom once angels descended!" And Ajax cries out (430-436): "*Aiai!* (woe!) who would ever have thought that my name, *Aias*, and my woes would thus accord? Now it is fitting that even twice I should wail *aiai*, and thrice, to such misfortune have I come, whose father from this same land of Ida, gaining the foremost prizes by valor, went home with all the glory of high fame." The failure of both sons has resulted from overconfidence in their own strength. Ajax believed he could do without the

help of the gods (768-775), and Amfortas set forth against Klingsor without receiving the Grail's permission. Both lack the perfect balance of σωφροσύνη. Amfortas also falls short of the Wagnerian standard in self-sacrificing love. For when he met Kundry in Klingsor's garden, he forgot the knights for whose sake he had come. This fact is dramatically emphasized by the contrasting character and experience of Parsifal. He strays into Klingsor's garden without any purpose whatever. He meets the same temptation, but resists it, forgetting himself that he may accomplish the deliverance of Amfortas. In the *Ajax*, Sophocles also introduces a character distinguished by the quality in which Ajax is deficient — Odysseus, τὸν εἰς φρονεῖντα (1252). In the end, however, it is only the deeds and the courage of Ajax that are considered. His madness and his hatred are passed over, when Odysseus defends his right to burial (1332 ff.). His heroism is fundamental, the cause of his ruin relatively superficial. Teucer calls him τῷ πάντ' ἀγαθῷ, "entirely noble" (1415). So, also, the sin of Amfortas is forgiven, as the drama concludes. His intense and prolonged repentance has proved his purity fundamental, and his wound is healed by the touch of the sacred lance, brought back to the Grail by Parsifal, who pronounces its former king *entsündigt und gesühnt*.

## CHAPTER VII

### ISOLDE AND PHAEDRA: RELUCTANT CONFESSIONS OF LOVE

THE scene between Isolde and her handmaiden in the beginning of *Tristan and Isolde* is a close parallel to the scene between Phaedra and the Nurse. At the first glance, however, there appears to be little relation between Isolde, whose love is beautiful, in Wagner's version, and Phaedra, whose passion is recognized, even by herself, as sinful. But if we look for the parallel, not between love and ἔρως, but between love and σωφροσύνη (the ideals upheld respectively in the *Ring* and the *Oresteia*), we find that the *Hippolytus*, as a whole, defends σωφροσύνη, though in a negative manner, by showing the tragedy that results from disregarding it. Ὑβρις, causing the death of Hippolytus, proves itself wrong. Similarly, unquestioning obedience to convention, causing the death of Tristan and Isolde, is represented as mistaken. Were it not for convention, Tristan and Isolde would have told King Mark of their love, and the conclusion of the drama shows how gladly he would have made them happy.

For convenience in tracing the course of the scene between Isolde and Brangäne, as it runs parallel to that between Phaedra and the Nurse, we may divide both into six corresponding sections.

I. The distraught and weak condition of the heroine is made known.

When the curtain rises, Isolde is "on a couch, with her face hidden in the pillows." She lies motionless for several minutes.

That Phaedra is first shown in a like position is indicated by the Nurse's words (179-180), "Out of doors now is your bed,"

and Phaedra's first line, 198, "Raise my body, lift my head." We were prepared for this by the preceding chorus (130-134).

That Isolde's quiet is the repression of emotion so violent as to have made her partly unconscious of her surroundings we see when, roused at last by a sailor's song, she asks Brangäne where they are. The handmaiden answers, "With a quiet sea, before evening we shall surely reach land." And Isolde asks, "What land?" though she knows as well as Brangäne that they are sailing to Cornwall. It matters little whether she asks because she is momentarily dazed, or because her anger at the thought of arrival makes her lead Brangäne to pronounce the hated name of Cornwall (so Phaedra leads the Nurse to pronounce the name of Hippolytus, v. 352), in order that she may contradict, "Never! not today, nor tomorrow!" In either case, she is out of tune with her environment, as Phaedra is shown to be by the Nurse's complaint (183-185).

II. Seizure by a mad desire, incomprehensible to the attendant, but plain to an audience familiar with the legend.

Isolde invokes wind and storm to destroy the ship. The wildness of her outburst, as of Phaedra's, is intensified by contrast with her preceding lassitude. Isolde's frantic desire to destroy her love and its object runs parallel to Phaedra's longing to defy *σωφροσύνη* and hunt in the forest with Hippolytus.

### III. Reaction.

Isolde collapses and falls on the couch, again hiding her face, her feeling doubtless like that of Phaedra, when the latter says (239 and 243-244), "Wretched that I am, what have I done? Nurse, cover my head again, for I am ashamed of the words I have spoken."

IV. The attendant expresses sympathy and begs for an explanation.

In Brangäne's plea, the recent behavior of her mistress is described. She says in part: "Isolde! Mistress! Dear heart,



what hast thou hid from me so long? Not one tear did'st thou shed for father and mother; hardly a parting word did'st thou have for them who remained; from home departing cold and mute, pale and silent on the voyage, without food, without sleep, wildly distraught, staring and wretched." The corresponding passage in the *Hippolytus*, while telling us nothing new, emphasizes by repetition the earlier description of Phaedra's state. With the above we may compare 273ff.:

*Nurse*: About all this she is silent.

*Chorus*: How weak she is, and how wasted her form.

*Nurse*: Could it be otherwise, when for three days she has had no food?"

#### V. Revelation of the object of her love.

Isolde demands air, and Brangäne pulls aside the hangings that screen their part of the deck, so that the rest becomes visible. Among the soldiers the figure of Tristan is conspicuous.

The Nurse, to be sure, only names Hippolytus; but as he, unlike Tristan, has already appeared, the mere mention of his name would call up in the spectator's mind a picture almost as vivid as the actual one presented by Wagner.

#### VI. The mistress reveals her feelings, at first in words too vague for the attendant to understand.

Isolde reviews the events that have brought her to her present state of despair. The purpose this narrative serves is similar to that of Phaedra's long speech (372-430). Like it, also, this begins calmly, following an excited passage that included a short chorus. Isolde commences, "Thou hast beheld my shame, now learn what brought it on me," an introductory remark resembling (390), "I will tell thee the course of my thought." Brangäne, however, remains in the dark as to Isolde's purpose, while the Nurse has already come to understand her mistress. In Isolde's anger Brangäne sees only failure to appre-

ciate the dignity to become hers with the Cornish crown, and when Isolde murmurs, "Unloved, seeing the noblest man ever near me, — how could I bear that torture?" the hand-maiden believes her mistress is thinking of Mark. Her reply reminds us of the lines of the Nurse, following the mention of Hippolytus and preceding Phaedra's acknowledgement (313 ff.) And, indeed, two verses in this passage might almost be transferred from Phaedra's lips to Isolde's (319 and 331): "A friend has made me suffer, against my will, against his. . . . From shame let me contrive an honorable escape." When Brangäne realizes that Isolde is resolved on death, she feels, like the Nurse, that she must save her mistress at any cost. Her act, also, makes greater trouble, wrong is done to an innocent man (to Mark as to Hippolytus), and death follows after all. Brangäne realizes her mistake immediately, and as the Chorus criticizes the Nurse (596): "With kind intent, but not with honor, thou hast found a remedy," so she blames herself, saying at the close of Act I: "Unavoidable, lasting danger, instead of sudden death! Foolish fidelity's work, fraught with deceit, now comes to flower in woe!"

## CHAPTER VIII

### WAGNER'S MUSIC AND THE PARODOS OF THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

IN Wagner's *Gesammelte Schriften* IV, 190 we read: "The necessarily emotional interpretation of the drama, given in Greek tragedy by the Chorus, is supplied and developed by the modern orchestra, free from all limitations, with infinite variety of expression; the persons who compose the Chorus are accordingly removed from the orchestra to the stage, in order to bring the germ of individuality which was in the Greek Chorus to its highest independent growth as an acting and suffering character in the drama," and in IX, p. 309: "If ancient tragedy was obliged to curtail its dialogue because it had to be inserted between choral odes and kept separate from them, in the modern orchestra this interpreting element of music, still continuing to give the drama a higher significance, always accompanies the action."

It is evident, then, that Wagner felt that the orchestra in his dramas had assumed and extended the interpretative functions of the Greek Chorus, and a comparison of parts of his scores with certain passages in the choral odes tends to justify his belief. The difficulties and incongruities in such a comparison are obvious. The aspect of a situation, or the phase of an emotion, that music can best make us realize, is, on that account, beyond the reach of words, and the aspect or phase that words can put before us most clearly cannot possibly be defined in music. In Wagner's scores, however, music comes very near to being poetry, as the words of the Greek lyrics come very near to being music. Of course,

Wagner's orchestra plays a more important part than any Chorus, even those of Aeschylus. It speaks continuously; not merely during the interludes and in pauses between speeches, but all through the speeches as well. Allowing, however, for the essential differences between Greek expression in words, colored by music (of which we are unfortunately ignorant), and Wagnerian expression in music rooted in words, we find many instances in which Wagner's orchestra produces effects such as the Chorus produced in Greek tragedy.

It would be possible for a Greek student with no musical knowledge to gain an accurate idea of what Wagner's orchestra adds to his text, by considering what the *Parodos* of the *Seven against Thebes* adds to the dialogue it follows. This *Parodos* is a lyric development of two *motifs* — the attack on Thebes and the prayer for deliverance. Though of the utmost importance in the drama, the attack cannot be represented. Its progress can only be described and its violence suggested. It is pictured by the Messenger (59-64): "At hand now, in full armor, the Argive host comes in clouds of dust, and white foam splashes from the horses' mouths on the plain. Do thou, as a ship's worthy helmsman, secure the city before it is swept by the blasts of Ares. For it roars, that billowy host, over the dry land." The first lines of the Chorus impress the picture more clearly on our mental vision by going over its outlines. They do not draw a new picture, or even make important additions to the one already drawn, but they emphasize the ideas previously suggested by repeating them in different words and freer rhythm (79-85): "It is let loose, the host. Forth from the camp it flows, this great crowd that runs before the horsemen. High in air, the dust tells me this, voiceless, yet distinct, a truthful messenger. And still through my ears tears the sound of my country's plains beaten by horses' hoofs. It flies, it roars, like undammed torrents dashing down the mountains."

The Messenger's announcement is followed immediately by the prayer of Eteocles (69-77). It voices the emotion roused in king and people of Thebes by the news. This emotion provides the second *motif* of the choral ode, which is developed at greater length than the *motif* of the attack. It first appears in 86-87, but does not at once force the other *motif* into the background, for the latter reappears in 88-90. This is the beginning of a passage (86-107) in which the first *motif*, developed in a description of sights and sounds incident to the attack, alternates with the second *motif*, developed in cries for deliverance from the dangers so heralded. This alternation emphasizes the relation of cause and effect which exists between the two *motifs* and creates an impression of confusion appropriate to the situation. The questions also contribute toward this. With the appeal to the gods that guard the city in v. 109, the confusion subsides a little, and the most explicit description of the attack in the ode follows (120-126): "The Argives are about the city of Cadmus in a circle. There is the terror of war's arms. Bound fast in the horses' mouths the bits ring death. Seven bold heroes, chieftains of the host, brandishing spears, fully equipt, at the seven gates are standing, each where his lot assigned." The last three lines are not, like the rest of the description in the ode, an expansion of the ideas in 59-64, but of 55-56, "I left them drawing lots, that, as thus assigned, each to one gate would lead his band." This is followed by a passage of uninterrupted supplication (127-150), then by a strophe and antistrophe in which greater terror is again indicated by an alternate use of the two *motifs*. The ode concludes with a prayer (166-180), in which the references to the native dialect (169-170), "The city toiling with the spear, betray not to an army speaking another tongue," and to the sacrifices to the gods (177-180), "Have a care for the offerings made by the people, and caring, defend them. Of glad

sacrifices made in the city's mysteries be mindful, I implore," recall parts of the prayer of Eteocles (71-73 and 76-77): "Tear not my city up by the roots and give it not to utter destruction, captured by the spears of the foe, the city that pours out the speech of Hellas . . . but be our strength; of benefit to both, I believe, are my words, for a city that thrives honors the gods."

The ode, then, gives us no information. When it is ended we know no more about the state of affairs, but we realize far more keenly what such a state means, — the confusion it involves, the terror it awakens, the disasters it portends. It is just this kind of intense realization of the dramatic situation that Wagner produces by his use of the orchestra. Sometimes he creates it by suggesting actual sights and sounds, such as Aeschylus suggests in the lines describing the enemy's approach. The tapping of the Nibelungs' hammers, the thud of the giants' footsteps, the gallop of the Valkyrs' horses, and the flicker of the flames around Brünnhilde's rock, are a few such instances. More frequently, however, Wagner uses the orchestra to express emotion, as Aeschylus uses the Chorus in the supplicatory passages of the ode. How plaintively and how urgently it can entreat we learn when Brünnhilde pleads with the god who has just decreed her banishment from the life of Valkyrs to such disgrace as the world may inflict on her helplessness (*Walküre*, Act III).

Although sights and sounds represented orchestrally are generally put before us on the stage at the same time, there are some passages in Wagner's scores that describe, as parts of this *Parodos* do, something off the stage. In the first act of *Parsifal*, words define the incidents of Kundry's arrival, much as the Messenger's speech defines the incidents of the army's advance in the *Seven against Thebes*, but it is the orchestra that makes us realize the terrifying speed with which horse and rider sweep forward, now skimming through the

air, now galloping madly over the earth, until the music rises to an overwhelming climax, and Kundry runs in.

On almost every page in Wagner's scores the orchestra gives expression to emotions that the words barely suggest. As an illustration, however, of the way Wagner adds orchestral music to words and vocal melody to produce an effect similar to that achieved in the *Seven against Thebes* by supplementing the prayer of Eteocles with those of the Chorus, a passage in the first act of *Tristan and Isolde* will perhaps serve as well as any. Brangäne, looking at the blue strip of land on the horizon, has just said that by evening they will be sailing into the harbor of Cornwall, when Isolde cries out, "Never!" Excited as the following words are, their desperation is magnified many times in the whirlwind of tone sweeping through the orchestra. While Aeschylus expands the idea of supplication on a single plane, as it were, by reiterated appeals to the gods already mentioned by Eteocles, and by invocations to others, Wagner expands his presentation of Isolde's despair on different planes at once by making the vocal melody move over a tempestuous surge of tone. Isolde's emotion, like that of the maidens of the Chorus, is caused by the knowledge that what she dreads is approaching. Cornwall stands to Isolde for all that is most hateful — she fears it as she would fear a monster eager to spring upon her when the ship brings her to its lair. Something like this is suggested by the violence with which the *Cornwall* motive leaps out of the orchestra. It keeps before us the object and cause of the dread that prompts Isolde's outcry, just as in the *Parodos* a word here and there in the invocations suggests the attack and its possible consequences, which are the object of the maidens' fear and the cause of their prayers. Such phrases are ὀρόμενον κακόν (87), δουλοσύνης ὑπερ (111), δαίτων ἄλωσιν (119), πόλιν δορίπρονον μὴ προδῶθ' ἑτεροφώνῃ στρατῷ (169-170).

The alternate repetition of two musical phrases occurs

frequently in Wagner, and one instance in which the relation between them is that of cause and effect, as in the case of the two *motifs* in vv. 86-107, occurs at the beginning of the *Walküre*. When Sieglinde finds the exhausted Siegmund and brings him water, the motive of *Siegmund's Weariness* is several times repeated, with the motive of *Sieglinde's Sympathy* following each repetition.



## CHAPTER IX

### WAGNER'S USE OF THE ORCHESTRA AS A MEDIUM FOR POETIC EXPRESSION

#### I. ORCHESTRAL DESCRIPTIONS

##### (a) *Long Passages*

It would be possible, I believe, to classify every part of Wagner's scores under one or the other of the two headings represented by the two *motifs* in the *Parodos* of the *Septem*. The passages describing anything that could be directly apprehended by the senses are, of course, few compared with those expressing emotion, but they are characteristic and successful. Conspicuous are the orchestral representations of storms in the *Flying Dutchman*, *Rheingold*, and *Walküre*. As a shrieking wind follows the tones of the chromatic scale, it is one of the very few natural sounds that can actually be reproduced in music. Add to this the rumble of thunder, which can be imitated on the drum, and one easily makes in the orchestra the two most characteristic sounds that accompany a storm. In the *Flying Dutchman* the orchestra suggests the mighty swell of the ocean, the sudden breaking of waves against the ship, the wind moaning over the waters and whistling through the rigging. This storm-music is heard first in the *Overture*, where it accompanies the *Dutchman* motive and alternates with passages that express emotion, as the two *motifs* alternate in the *Parodos* of the *Septem*. Pictures of breaking waves are found also in at least two choral odes: in the *Septem* (758-761), and in the *Antigone* (586-589). The features of the tempest represented orchestrally in the

*Flying Dutchman* are those which are mentioned in Aeschylus's *Supplices*, 33-36: "The hurricane with its stormy buffeting, thunder and lightning, and the rain-bearing winds of the furious ocean."

The thunder-shower in *Rheingold* is painted in magnificent orchestral colors, but as a similar picture is not found in any Greek chorus, we may turn to the mountain thunder-storm in the *Vorspiel* to the *Walküre*. The main motive in this prelude suggests the pelting of heavy raindrops, driven against the walls of a house by fierce gusts of wind. This phrase, consisting of five staccato tones, preceded by a short, quick run, produces almost the same mental impression as the words *δύσομβρα βέλη* in the famous chorus of the *Antigone* (359 ff.) on man's achievements. The storm at the end of the second act of the *Walküre* is different. No rainfall is indicated, only the lightning, piercing clouds gathered in the mountain-pass, and the thunder that shakes rocks. It is not a natural shower, but something portentous. The god rides on the storm-clouds, and to men who fight in their midst he brings death. In character and significance the storm resembles that described in the *Oedipus at Colonus* (1462-1471): "Lo! the mighty crash of falling ruins, monstrous this thunder hurled by Zeus. Fright has crept even to the ends of my hair. My heart cowers in terror, from heaven the lightning blazes again. What will be the end? This is my fear, for never does the sun depart without disaster, — O mighty heaven, O Zeus!" In the *Waldweben* in *Siegfried* the orchestra suggests the rustle of leaves, just stirred by the breeze, and the hum of insects, — a gentle murmur in which all the sounds of the forest seem blended. Like the *Oedipus at Colonus*, 668-693, it paints in the woodland background and throws over the scene an atmosphere of idyllic beauty. This music does not grow out of the words, but rather beside them. It begins when Siegfried throws himself on the ground under the linden, and is

heard almost constantly throughout the scene preceding the dragon's entrance. And yet in words the forest is referred to only twice, and then simply in passing: "Now as never before the green woods delight me. . . . Thou lovely birdling! Never before have I heard thee. Is thy home here in the grove?" The orchestral passage preceding the latter quotation is the musical counterpart of *Oedipus at Colonus* (670-678), "Colonus, where the clear, low call of the nightingale sounds constantly in green glens, Colonus with its darkling ivy and the god's untrodden, holy grove, bearing countless fruits, untouched by sun and wind and storm of every kind, where revelling Dionysus doth ever tread his haunt, dancing about the goddesses who reared him." The first strophe and antistrophe of this chorus describe the place that is the background of the preceding *Epeisodion*, and in this way are related to it as the *Waldweben* music to the words it accompanies. And as the forest is simply mentioned, and not described in words, so Colonus and its grove are referred to in the *Epeisodion* only by such expressions as "here" and "this land."

Near the beginning of the last act of *Tristan* is a passage that pictures the sea, stretching from the cliff to the horizon, gray and desolate, its cold expanse unbroken by the outline of a sail. The musical phrase, taken out of its context, could suggest nothing more than extent and desolation, but as it stands, its association with the sea is inevitable. In the *Vorspiel* to Act III it is employed in conjunction with two other phrases to create an impression of loneliness and suffering, such as is produced by *Philoctetes*, 681-705. Tristan, like Philoctetes, is on a lonely coast, parted from his desire by the sea. Its impression on the eye is suggested by the phrase in *Vorspiel* III, measures 7-10, as its impression on the ear is suggested by *Philoctetes*, 688-689, "alone with the sound of breakers dashing round about." Tristan's anguish,

physical as well as mental, is expressed in the opening phrase of the *Vorspiel* and in measures 30 ff., the musical equivalent of the "groan at gnawing pain" (694) and "heart-devouring woe" (705); while measures 11-15, which follow directly the phrase that pictures the sea, are equivalent in effect to 690, "how has he endured this all-tearful life?" The wistful pathos of the shepherd's piping, beginning in measure 52, is not unlike that of 703, "like a child away from its dear nurse."

#### (b) *Short Phrases*

While long descriptions are not frequent in Wagner's scores, short phrases used to suggest some act, to sketch some motion, as though with a single line, are countless. Sometimes, when the act is the manifestation of an inner state, or is closely associated with some person or place, the phrase is repeated and becomes a leading-motive. Such is the case with the phrase that suggests the weariness of Tannhäuser (Act III) as he plants his staff on the ground, and leaning on it, drags his heavy feet forward. It may remind one of *Agamemnon*, 79-82. The action and feeling are similar, though the causes are different. The *Beating* motive in the *Meistersinger* represents the hail of blows that fell on Beckmesser when his own lute was laid upon his shoulders by the angry David. A word-picture of blows is found in *Choëphoroi*, 425-427. Here, again, the dramatic situations are totally different, but the verbal phrase, like the musical one, helps to focus the attention on the rapid blows it accompanies. The rhythm of both is accelerated by a number of short beats in succession. A parallel to the *Flames* motive, used so often in the *Ring* to picture the tongues of fire that dart up on all sides of Brünnhilde's mountain, is found in *Agamemnon*, 92-93, "here and there, reaching to heaven, flames arise." The motive associated with Hagen in the *Götterdämmerung* is distinctly objec-

tive in its imagery. It suggests the leap of some malignant creature on its prey. A similar picture is outlined in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 1300-1302, "What evil spirit made a leap longer than the longest to bring thy evil doom?"

The musical references to the dragon in *Siegfried* describe nothing more than the motion of a clumsy beast, and are therefore comic, even though the monster is so formidable that its slaughter is enough to prove Siegfried the greatest of heroes. Descriptive music can imitate sound or represent motion, but it cannot picture clearly either color or form. It can represent, in a way, light or darkness, and a phrase may suggest by its own direction a straight object, like a spear or lance (as the *Compact* motive in the *Ring*, and the *Lance* motive in *Parsifal*), but its possibilities in this line are soon exhausted. Where the painter can do most, the musician can do least, but the poet is less restricted. Because of the nature of the material in which he works, he can express more than the painter and describe more than the musician. This may well be the reason why the descriptions of monsters found in the Greek choruses do not often portray their motion, like the *Dragon* motive, but some feature of their appearance. In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 510, the sphinx is presented as "a maid with wings" and in 1199 as "with crooked talons." Other monsters are described in Euripides's *Heracleidae*, 375-377 and 397, and *Iphigenia in Tauris*, 1244-1248. In the *Phoenissae*, however, motion of one kind or another is suggested in 657-661, 806-810, and 1018-1025.

Another instance of a different form of description resulting from the use of a different medium we find in the case of the Rhine music in *Rheingold*. When Euripides shows us a river, he generally shows it in its setting, as in *Phoenissae*, 645-648: "Where the fair waters of the stream overflow the fields, Dirce's fields, bearing green grass and deeply sown,"

and also *Troades*, 226–229, *Phoenissae*, 825 ff., *Hecuba*, 451 ff., *Bacchae*, 406 ff., *Iphigenia in Tauris*, 1098 ff. The Rhine-music, on the other hand, gives us no inkling as to the character of the country through which the river flows. But it makes us realize the strong current, moving steadily below countless undulating ripples and swirling eddies. It makes us more intensely aware than colors or words could do, of a force tireless and inexhaustible, all life and movement, ever changing yet never entirely different.

The motion of one thing around another which is itself moving forward is charmingly represented in Euripides's *Electra* (432–437): "Glorious ships which once went to Troy, with numberless oars convoying the dancing Nereids, where the flute-loving dolphin leapt in curves round the dark-beaked prows." The same interrelation of two motions is indicated in the *Ring*, where the *Flame* motive dances around the *Call*, which Siegfried is represented as blowing on his horn while passing through the fire on his way up or down Brünnhilde's mountain (*Sf.* III and *Göttr.* I.).

(c) *Part Played by Instruments on the Stage like that Played by Chorus in Epeisodia*

Related to these purely descriptive passages are those in which the orchestra puts off its character of interpreter to step on the stage and become an actor. These are the cases in which a horn, a pipe, or a harp is represented as being played on the stage, or just behind the scenes, while the actual sounds are made by some instrument of the orchestra. There is no imitation or suggestion here. We are supposed to hear a harp played by Tannhäuser or Wolfram, a pipe played by the shepherd in *Tristan* or in *Tannhäuser*, a lute played by Beckmesser, a horn on which Siegfried or Hagen is blowing, and we do hear the tones of a real instrument in each case. When

it is not represented as played by characters who sing in the drama, it is customary to costume the members of the orchestra and send them on with their instruments, as in the case of the trumpeters in *Lohengrin* and *Tannhäuser*. Generally the instruments made actors in this way add to the stage picture, but have no effect on the progress of the action, and in this respect the part they play resembles that of many a Greek Chorus during the *Epeisodia*. Like the Chorus, they often call attention to someone approaching. In *Tannhäuser* the horns announce the entrance of the hunting-party (Act I) and of the arriving guests (Act II); in *Tristan* the shepherd's pipe announces the approach of the ship that brings Isolde to Kareol; and in the *Götterdämmerung* the horn frequently heralds the coming of Siegfried. The singing of the knights in *Tannhäuser* implies the accompaniment of a harp, and this the orchestra provides, not drawing our attention to itself in any way, but helping to produce the semblance of reality. So the Chorus, in some *Epeisodia*, supplies the listeners who are the necessary background for dramatic speeches in scenes like Aeschylus, *Choëphoroi*, 973-1064, Sophocles, *Antigone*, 1155-1179, Euripides, *Bacchae*, 1024-1152.

## II. ORCHESTRAL EXPRESSION OF EMOTION

By far the greater part, however, of Wagner's music is direct expression of emotion. The *Vorspiel* to *Lohengrin* is often said to portray the descent of the Grail; but it does so in the indirect way in which music by its nature is compelled to describe all but a very few sights and sounds — that is, by expressing, and so re-creating in the hearer, the emotion they arouse. The description of the *Venusberg* in the Overture to *Tannhäuser* suggests the revels only by expressing the excitement and abandon that characterize them. Where the medium of expression is verbal, we often follow the re-

verse method of procedure. Instead of description suggested by expression of emotion, we find emotion expressed by means of description. In the chorus (vv. 288-368) of the *Seven against Thebes*, for instance, the dread felt by the maidens in the besieged city receives, through the description of the sack of a town, expression more productive of sympathetic recoil on the part of the listener than would have been possible through direct statements of fright. The indirection of such methods of presenting either emotion or description often gives them added force by stirring the imagination to greater activity.

(a) *Long Passages*

Joyous excitement is expressed in the latter part of Act I of the *Walküre*, from the point where Sieglinde says, "O fänd' ich ihn heut' und hier, den Freund," to the fall of the curtain. The lovers' joy is to die in the next act with Siegmund, but the orchestra does not even hint at the approaching catastrophe. The second *Stasimon* of the *Trachinians* produces a similar effect. It does not anticipate in any way the tragedy whose approach we are to watch in the next *Epeisodion*. Instead, it follows the trend of Deianeira's feelings in what has preceded. Her happiness, like that of Siegmund and Sieglinde, has come suddenly after a long period of distress. This is recalled in 647-652, as Sieglinde's suffering is recalled in the music that goes with her words, "Fremdes nur sah ich von je," etc. The sudden change of tone in what follows is equally striking in both cases. In 653-654 the words move with a victorious rush, like the music that accompanies "Doch dich kannt' ich," etc. These passages, reminiscent of former sorrow, are preceded, in both dramas, by longer joyful sections, in which the happiness of the characters is magnified by being represented as shared by the surrounding country (*Trach.* 633-643, and Siegmund's song of love and spring). Then follow passages that bring out



the connection of this rejoicing in the outside world with that of the principal characters (*Trach.* 644-646, and "wohl musste den tap'ren Streichen," etc.).

The scene in the *Walküre* is much longer than the chorus in the *Trachinians*, but the conclusion (from "Bist du Siegmund" to the end) is restless and impetuous like the second antistrophe. Both urge haste — the haste with which Siegmund and Sieglinde would rush to freedom in the forest, and the haste with which Deianeira would have Heracles come to her. The *Sword* motive is prominent in the score, for the lovers depend on the sword to win their freedom. In the next act, however, we are to see Siegmund die, with the sword broken in his hand. Deianeira, also, is relying on something that will fail her, and the last lines of the chorus appear, doubtful as the text is, to refer to the robe that is to cause the death of Heracles.

Other joyous odes immediately preceding a catastrophe are the *ὑπορχήματα*, *Ai.* 693 ff., *Ant.* 1115, and *O. T.* 1086 ff. With the first it would be possible to compare, I think, the ecstatic music of the scene between Brünnhilde and Siegfried at the beginning of the *Götterdämmerung*, and with the second, the music that accompanies the procession to the church in *Lohengrin*, Act II.

The orchestral expression of the lonely Tristan's anguish, both physical and mental (*Vors.* III), has already been compared with the choral description of the suffering of Philoctetes (676 ff.).<sup>1</sup>

The music that accompanies Brünnhilde's entrance, when she approaches Siegmund to tell him that his death-hour has come, is not quite so close a parallel to *Heracidae* (608-629), but it resembles this chorus in several particulars. Siegmund is to be sacrificed in order that the dignity of the gods, particularly Fricka, may be maintained; Macaria is to be sac-

<sup>1</sup> Page 63.

rificed for the welfare of the state. The agony that the sacrifice involves for Sieglinde has been indicated just before ("Horch! die Hörner — Siegmund — ha!"), as the grief of Iolaus has been suggested in 602-607, but there is no allusion to either now. There is something in the restrained tone of the music and in its profound solemnity that leads our thoughts from the particular to the general aspect of the situation. We contemplate the approach of death, not merely, as during Sieglinde's outburst, the approach of Siegmund's death. A similar change in point of view is effected by *Heracleidae*, 608-617. The opening hexameter, like the *Fate* motive, which begins the corresponding passage in the *Walküre*, produces by its rhythmic weight, compared with the more rapid movement preceding, a sense of calm. With the introduction of the *Walhall* motive there is a return to the particular case and the beginning of a more heroic strain. The glory of entrance to Walhall will compensate Siegmund in part for the loss of life. The compensation in Macaria's case is indicated in the antistrophe, 618-629, the central idea of which is expressed in 623-624, "Far from inglorious the fame among men that will open its gates to her."

#### (b) *Short Phrases*

The fright of the Flower-maidens in the beginning of Act II, Scene II, of *Parsifal* is represented by a phrase in which we find a suggestion of flutter, just as we do in *Prometheus*, 183, ἐπὶ δὲ φρένας ἐρέθισε διάροπος φόβος.

The misery of exile, which is expressed in the moving phrase heard in *Flying Dutchman*, Act I, before he says, "Weit komm' ich her," has been given verbal expression by Euripides in *Medea*, 441-443, "Thou hast no paternal halls, unhappy woman, in which to find a harbor from distress," and 655-657, "On thee not a country, not a single friend, took pity, suffering things most dire to suffer."

The *Slumber* motive, with which Wagner produces some of the most beautiful effects in the *Ring*, is as simple and peaceful as *Hecuba*, 915-916, "Sleep sweetly on the eyes is shed," and *Philoctetes*, 827.

The impression produced by the *Bondage* motive, heard so frequently throughout the *Ring*, is much the same as that created by the lines (*Andr.* 133-134), "The conqueror is upon thee, why struggle, thou who art nothing?"

The chiasitic treatment of the *Nature* motive in *Rheingold*, Act IV, deserves comment. It is an ascending phrase and is used in the *Ring* to indicate life and growth. When Erda tells Wotan that the power of the gods, which has been growing under his rule, is destined to wane, the *Nature* motive is immediately followed by its own inversion, which is thenceforth used as the motive of the *Fall of the Gods*. The effect of this inversion is similar to that of the chiasmus in *Choëphoroi*, 312-313, "For a blow blood-reeking, a blood-reeking blow be atonement!" and, like it, presents in the briefest way the central idea of the drama. The establishment of Wotan's power and its overthrow constitute the subject-matter of the *Ring*; the murder of Agamemnon and the resulting murder of Clytemnestra constitute the subject-matter of the *Oresteia*.

(c) *Wagner's Orchestra and the Choral Odes of Three Tragedies*

How far it is reasonable to consider that Wagner's orchestra has followed in the steps of the Greek Chorus can be best determined, perhaps, by analyzing in one characteristic play by each of the three tragic poets the relation the choral odes bear to the plot and dialogue, and by noting the instances in which Wagner's music bears a similar relation to plot and text. From such analyses of the *Agamemnon*, the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and the *Hippolytus*, the following comparisons are taken.

The second interlude in *Götterdämmerung*, I, begins with the *Bondage* motive, and concludes, forty measures farther on, with the same phrase, to which a different introduction and inflection are given. Similarly, the third *Stasimon* of the *Agamemnon* begins and ends with differing expressions of fear, 975-983, 1030-1033. The lines that follow the opening question, uncertain as the readings are, refer evidently to the earlier time when the troubles whose results we are about to witness were just beginning. The *Bondage* motive is followed at once by the *Rhinemaidens' Call* (in the minor) and the *Ring* motive, which recall the opening of *Rheingold* and the stealing of the gold. *Siegfried's Call* and the *Siegfried* motive are next heard — phrases that in the preceding dramas of the cycle have always been joyous, but that have lost this character through association with the sinister tones into whose company they have been drawn. Siegfried is again proving his valor, but now, for the first time, under an evil influence and for a wrong purpose. Like Siegfried's activity, Agamemnon's return, under normal circumstances, would be cause for rejoicing, but the dominating will of Clytemnestra has made it arouse foreboding instead. The effect of 988-993 is not unlike that of the *Call* and the *Siegfried* motive. The lines of the ode on which the greatest stress seems to be thrown are 1019-1021, and the phrase on which the orchestra lays the most emphasis is the *Compact* motive, in measures 19-20 and 27-28. Both portend evil and create a sense of the impossibility of escape. The blood Agamemnon has shed will cause his own death, and the compact Siegfried has just made with Gunther will bring destruction on his own head. The interlude ends with the *Bondage* motive, enunciated with an inflection that resembles *Agamemnon*, 1030-1031. The *pianissimo* introductory phrase in measure 39 may be compared to  $\nu\bar{\nu}\nu \delta' \dot{\iota}\pi\acute{o} \sigma\acute{\kappa}\acute{o}\tau\eta$ , the sudden *crescendo* on one chord to *forte* at the beginning of measure 41, to  $\beta\rho\acute{\epsilon}\mu\epsilon \theta\upsilon\mu\alpha\lambda\acute{\eta}\varsigma$ ,

and the equally sudden *diminuendo* to the next chord, taken *piano* in the middle of measure 41, to the corresponding decline in intensity to οὐδὲν ἐπελπομένα.

Throughout the *Agamemnon* the choral odes bring to mind earlier events in the story, as the orchestra does in the later parts of the *Ring*.

Like leading motives, references to the law of δρᾶσαντι παθεῖν and to Helen run through the odes, but seldom appear in the dialogue.

Following the downfall of Oedipus, the *Fourth Stasimon* of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* reviews his life, briefly, but vividly, emphasizing its contrasts in a style whose grandeur Wagner equals in the march that follows Siegfried's death in *Götterdämmerung*. The utter hopelessness of vv. 1186-1188 is expressed musically in measures 1-13 (counting as 1 the measure following "Brünnhilde bietet mir . . . Gruss!"). The *crescendo* and *diminuendo* occurring twice in measures 14-25 contain a suggestion not unlike that of 1189-1192, and the sadness of 1193-1196 is to be found in measures 26-38. The climax of the march follows, measures 39-63, in which the motives associated with Siegfried's exploits are delivered *fortissimo*, producing an effect like that of 1197-1203. The sudden extinguishing of this blaze of glory in the next measures is like the descent to 1204. There are only seven measures left of the march, while half of the ode is still to come, but in these measures the *Brünnhilde* motive points toward the wrongdoing that has caused Siegfried's death — a crime committed unconsciously, like that of Oedipus, against the one person in the world he should have cherished.

Vv. 752-763 of the *Hippolytus* picture Phaedra's voyage from Crete and landing at Athens. Such a contrast between past happiness and present misfortune as is indicated in 755-760 is generally suggested in music by the transfer of a motive from the major to the minor mode, or by some change in the

manner of delivering it. Instances are the *Ride* motive in *Götterdämmerung*, II, when the captive Brünnhilde is led in by Gunther, and the *Kareol* motive in Act III of *Tristan and Isolde*. The latter expresses, when it first occurs, Kurwenal's joyous certainty of his master's recovery, and it sounds again, sadly and brokenly, when Kurwenal draws his last breath beside the dead Tristan.

*Hippolytus*, 1118-1141, is reminiscent of pleasures that will never be repeated. We find something like this in *Lohengrin*, III, at the close of the first scene. In the beginning of this scene Wagner introduces a lovely phrase, to which both Elsa and Lohengrin sing successively, and then together, "Feeling for thee so sweet a glow in my heart, breathing joy that none but God can grant." In the end of the scene, when Elsa has asked the question that compels Lohengrin to leave, just after he says, "Alas! now all our happiness is lost!" the orchestra plays this phrase in a way that makes one poignantly conscious of their former delight and of the fact that it is irretrievably lost. As the orchestra recalls something previously sung, so the Chorus in 1138-1139, "Bare of crowns are the resting-places of Leto's daughter in the deep, fresh grass," recalls an earlier passage in trimeter, 73-74, "For thee this wreathèd crown from the unmown meadow, goddess, I have made and brought."

## CHAPTER X

### ORCHESTRAL AND CHORAL PRELUDES

THERE are in Wagner's scores a number of important orchestral interludes, which separate scenes, as the choral odes separate *Epeisodia*, while his preludes correspond in some ways to the *Parodoi*. Where the *Parodos* does not open the tragedy, the information given in the Prologue is seldom more than that required for the complete understanding of one of Wagner's *Vorspiele*. Any musical listener would realize at the first hearing what mood each prelude was intended to portray and to create. But to understand the significance of the themes, and through them the exact relation of the prelude to the events of the drama, a preliminary study of the score or a previous hearing of the work, or portions of it, is essential.

#### I. THE OVERTURE TO THE FLYING DUTCHMAN AND THE PARODOS OF THE PERSAE

In thematic construction the overture to the *Flying Dutchman* resembles the *Parodos* of the *Persae*. It presents two contrasting themes, the motive of the *Dutchman* (the musical symbol for his recklessness and the curse it brought upon him) and the motive of *Redemption*, which he believes can never be his. So Aeschylus contrasts the pomp and magnitude of the Persian army with the defeat it never expected to encounter. He uses more words to describe the army's vastness than to anticipate its misfortunes, but the fear of disaster, first suggested in vv. 8-11, is more forcibly expressed in vv. 93-101, and completely dominates the last strophes of the ode, vv. 114-139. Wagner treats the *Redemption*

motive in much the same way. It appears first in measures 65-79, *pianissimo*; later, in measures 285-288, *fortissimo* and *maestoso*; and beginning in measure 329, faster and again *fortissimo*, it forms the main part of the *finale*.

The overture begins with a tremolo on D and A, but no definite thematic idea is expressed until the third measure, where the horns announce the *Dutchman* motive. It is a curious fact that the third word in the *Parodos* is the first to convey a distinct idea to the listener, and that this word, *Περσῶν*, like the *Dutchman* motive, designates the individuals from whom the drama takes its name. The first division of the overture indicates the scene of the drama as clearly as do the lines (1-7), "Of the Persians who went to the land of Hellas the trusted counsellors we are called, and of their rich and gold-filled dwellings the guardians, whom, by right of rank, himself King Xerxes, royal son of Darius, chose to watch over his country." The stormy sea is the *Dutchman's* only home, and it would be as unnatural to think of him away from its tumult as of the Persians deprived of their "rich and gold-filled" palaces. Then, with a slackening of the tempo, the second theme is introduced (measure 65), *pianissimo*, corresponding to the first vague forebodings of the Persian elders (10-11), "But about the return of the king and his gold-clad army, forebodings of evil now greatly trouble the heart in my breast." The word *Persians* in v. 15 brings us back to what we may call the first theme of the *Parodos* and leads directly to the long enumeration, beginning in v. 16, much as the *Dutchman* motive, *pianissimo*, in measure 90, leads to a return of the storm-music, which continues without interruption from measure 97 to measure 179. In this passage (measure 129), there is a repetition of the *Dutchman* motive, *fortissimo*, which might possibly be compared to the recurrence of the word *Persians* in v. 23, where it is given a more emphatic position than in either v. 1 or v. 16.



The first change of metre (from six-quarter to four-quarter) occurs with the introduction of the *Sailors' Chorus* (measure 179). This corresponds to the change from anapaests to ionics, v. 65, where we come to the first mention of bridging the Hellespont. In both cases a new theme is treated briefly and dismissed, to reappear a little later (*Fl. D.*, measure 267; *Pers.* 109-113). This third theme, as introduced here, seems only to emphasize the Dutchman's misfortune by contrasting with it the cheerfulness of the Norwegian sailors, and yet in the course of the drama it is through meeting these sailors and their captain, Daland, that the Dutchman finds Senta and his redemption. The reference to bridging the Hellespont bears a similar relation to the principal theme of the *Parodos*. That action appeared to be the supreme display of the Persians' power, but it led to their crushing defeat.

Soon after, we find the first emphatic enunciation of the second theme, which interrupts the storm music quite suddenly at measure 285. It appears no longer as the remote and indistinct vision suggested in measures 65-79, but as a present power, majestic and invincible. We may observe the same difference between the indefinite foreboding of *Persae*, vv. 10-11, and the convincing force of vv. 93-101, "But the wiles contrived by God to deceive, what mortal man shall escape? Who is he who with swift foot and fortunate leap will dart away? With kindly and beguiling mien Até draws a mortal into her net; thence it is not possible for man to spring forth and flee," which interrupts, most unexpectedly, the description of the might of the Persian army. A brief reappearance of the first theme follows (measures 313-320), corresponding to vv. 102-107, after which, with a change of metre from six-quarter to four-quarter, the second theme establishes its supremacy, just as with the change from ionics to trochees at *Persae*, v. 114, forebodings of misfortune supplant all else in the minds of the Persian elders. The anapaests

(140-154) form a transition leading to the entrance of Atossa, much as the orchestral opening to Act I accompanies the entrance and anchoring of the Norwegian ship and leads to the appearance of Daland.

## II. THE OVERTURE TO *TANNHÄUSER* AND THE PARODOS OF THE *OEDIPUS TYRANNUS*

The greater part of the Overture to *Tannhäuser* pictures the revels of the Venusberg, much as the *Parodos* of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* describes the plague. The latter destroyed the strength of Thebes, as the former consumed the moral fibre of its victims. This vividly colored music is preceded by the *Pilgrims' Chorus*, a prayer for deliverance from spiritual weakness that has the dignity and the urgency of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 158 ff.: "First on thee, I call, daughter of Zeus, immortal Athene, and the protectress of the land, thy sister, Artemis, who in the circle of the *agora* sits on her glorious throne, and I implore Phoebus, the far-darter, — O ye three who ward off death, appear, I beseech ye! If ever before when doom rushed upon the city, ye drove afar the flame of woe, come also now." Both passages are characterized by that universality which makes it possible to associate them with other situations in which circumstances would be different, but the need the same. The musical link between the divisions of the overture is the theme that appears first in measures 17-31, and later, with a change in rhythmical treatment, in measures 125-137. A similar connection between the first antistrophe and the second strophe is effected by the word *πῆμα* (woe), which we find in 165-167, and again in 168-169, "O horror! countless are the woes I bear," where (like the theme in the *Pilgrims' Chorus*) it has a different position in the metrical scheme, which has itself been altered, with the change of subject, to a more rapid movement. The appearance of four-quarter rhythms and a quicker tempo with the entrance

of the *Venus* music (the *Pilgrims' Chorus* is in three-quarter) is parallel to the change from the dactyls of the first strophe and antistrophe to the logaoedics of the second. The abandonment of the sojourner in the *Venusberg* to the pursuit of pleasure is represented by several striking themes, much as the abandonment of the city to the plague is shown in the pictures that crowd one upon another in vv. 168-191.

Noteworthy also is the fact that the controlling agency in the drama is presented first. The *Pilgrims' Chorus*, suggesting the spiritual power of human aspiration and endeavor, represents, like the oracle of Apollo addressed in the beginning of the *Parodos*, the higher force which is to direct the course of events.

### III. THE VORSPIEL TO TRISTAN AND ISOLDE AND THE PARODOS OF THE SUPPLICES OF AESCHYLUS

In contrast with the preludes to Wagner's earlier works the *Vorspiel* to *Tristan and Isolde* suggests no pictures. It is the expression of a mood for which one could not easily find a counterpart in the natural or the legendary world. Longing, as hopeless as deathless, is voiced in every phrase, as the note of appeal sounds from beginning to end of the *Parodos* of the *Supplices*. We hear this note even before we learn who the Chorus are, for like the *Longing* motive in *Tristan* (measures 1-15), it stands at the very beginning of the drama (1-2): "May Zeus, god of suppliants, look graciously upon our company." The Danaids justify their appeal to Zeus and the Argives by the claim of relationship to both through descent from Io. A similar justification of the longing of *Tristan and Isolde* is represented by the *Glance* motive, which appears in measures 17-19. This motive is associated with the time, prior to the drama, when, in an unguarded moment, a glance revealed to them the love that subsequent acts appeared to deny. In the course of the prelude the motive

reappears seven times (measures 32, 40, 55, 74, 84, 87, 94), but the complete story of the glance is not told until Scene III of Act I. The story of Io, referred to frequently in the *Parodos* (vv. 17-19, 41-54, 141-143, 151-153, 162-165, 170-172), is more fully treated in the *Second Stasimon* (524-599). Although convinced of the justice of their appeal, the Danaids are not certain that it will be granted, and they feel that in the event of failure they will kill themselves rather than submit to the sons of Aegyptus (154-161). To Isolde, also, death appears as a way of escape from longing unfulfilled, and the phrase called the motive of *Deliverance by Death* dominates measures 63-72 of the *Vorspiel*. The graceful character of this motive, which is absolutely devoid of the sombre quality that generally distinguishes themes of similar significance, may be compared with the surprising metaphor found in 159-160, "We shall come to the king of the dead with suppliant olive-branches, the ropes in which we shall hang ourselves." In the conclusion of the *Parodos* the note of appeal is again heard (v. 175), "From on high may he hearken to our call," as is the *Longing* motive at the end of the *Vorspiel* (measures 103-106), while the last ominous phrase (measures 106-111) finds a parallel in vv. 165-166, "On an angry wind comes the storm," which were undoubtedly repeated at the close of the antistrophe.

## CHAPTER XI

### ORCHESTRAL AND CHORAL CONCLUSIONS

LIKE the Greek Chorus, Wagner's orchestra generally concludes the drama. It bridges the space separating the events portrayed from the life of everyday to which we return, instead of dropping us off at the end to get across as best we may. It lends dignity to the fall of the curtain, just as the recited anapaests lend dignity to the withdrawal of actors and Chorus, and it usually states in a general way the central idea of the drama.

*Tannhäuser* is the only one of the dramas in which the last measures of the orchestral score are not particularly significant. They are simply a repetition of the chords of the dominant and tonic, and might serve well enough for the conclusion of almost any opera, like the ending we find Euripides repeating in plays as different as the *Alcestis*, the *Medea*, and the *Bacchae*. These measures are intended to do no more than accompany the fall of the curtain, for what the orchestra usually contributes at the end of the drama has already been expressed in the final singing of the *Pilgrims' Chorus*.

The conclusion of the *Götterdämmerung* is exceptional in that the leading motive there employed is not one that has played an important part in the score. It is the motive named *Redemption by Love*, representing the self-sacrificing impulse which is the opposite of the ambition that caused the tragic end of Wotan just witnessed. In the last lines of the *Antigone*, Sophocles exalts in a similar way τὸ φρονεῖν (understanding), a quality which is the opposite of that which has caused Creon's misfortune (1348-1349): "Understanding is

the very beginning of happiness." The cause is then referred to in a general way (1349-1352), "One must in matters affecting the gods commit no sin. Great words bring great blows upon the overboastful as penalty," as in *Götterdämmerung* the cause of Wotan's downfall, the building of *Walhall*, is recalled by the *Walhall* motive. This motive first appeared near the beginning of the drama (in the opening of Scene II of *Rheingold*) and the *motif* of the corresponding lines of this chorus also appeared near the beginning of the play, in the *Parodos* (127-128), "Zeus hates exceedingly the proud tongue's boasts." Finally we have a line that leaves one feeling that conflict and suffering have given place to peace, 1353, "To age they have taught understanding." This is paralleled in *Götterdämmerung* by the concluding repetition of the *Redemption* motive.

*Parsifal*, too, has a quiet ending, and it is possible, I think, to see in it some resemblance to the concluding lines of the *Ion* of Euripides. *Parsifal* has at last come to fulfil the longing of the Grail knights for a deliverer, as *Ion* is going to fulfil the longing of Xanthos and Creusa for a son. Both are to assume positions of high honor, for which, in the drama, they have been proved worthy, *Ion* by birth and *Parsifal* by character. In both cases the hand of a divine power has been at work, and its long-doubted clemency finally proved. In the *Ion* the scene has been laid throughout, and in *Parsifal*, through two of the three acts, in the precinct of that power. *Parsifal* concludes with the most significant of three motives that have been associated with the Grail and its knights. This is the motive of *Sympathy* (also called the motive of the *Eucharist*), which has been used to represent the Christlike love for all mankind, which the knights endeavor to achieve, and which has been reflected in *Parsifal*'s life. The last utterance of the motive by the orchestra seems, like the end of the *Ion*, to be indirectly addressed to the audience. It exalts the

divine power that has been active in the drama, and seems to suggest that those who order their lives in accordance with its dictates will, like Parsifal, be rewarded in the end. The implication resembles what is actually expressed in *Ion*, 1619–1622.

At the close of *Tristan and Isolde* the orchestra gently produces a relaxing of the tension in which we have been held throughout. By playing the *Longing* motive it points again to the subject of the drama, just as the Chorus does at the end of *Oedipus Tyrannus* (1524), "O dwellers in our native city, Thebes, behold, this is Oedipus." This motive, because of its close relation to the important situations of the drama, recalls all that has combined to produce the tragic picture before us, as do the lines (1525–1527): "by him the famous riddle was solved, and mightiest was he of men; on his fortune no envious glance is cast by the people, by such a wave of dire disaster he has been stricken." The moment in which Wagner makes us contemplate the final picture, where the central figures are motionless in death and the others in grief, gives opportunity for a partial detachment and a turning from the particular to the general, such as is produced by 1528–1529. "Therefore, in the case of mortals, look thoughtfully toward that last day, and call none happy," and in the last tones that rise from the orchestra there is a suggestion of ultimate peace, as there is in 1529–1530, "till he has passed the end of life and suffered no distress."

The end of the *Walküre* is in some respects not unlike that of the *Ajax*. The conflict of wills is over and Wotan is concerned with the performance of the last service he can render the daughter who lies before him asleep and from whom he is parting forever. There is the same dignified and tender pathos in his actions and the music accompanying them that there is in Teucer's directions for Ajax's burial (1402–1417). And in the last few measures played by the orchestra after

Wotan has turned away there is a complete impersonality and abstraction from all that is definite, such as we find in the concluding lines of the Chorus (1418-1420).

The *Rheingold* ends, as all Greek tragedies had to end, with the characters marching away from the spectators. The orchestra plays the motives associated with the castle toward which they are proceeding and the rainbow-bridge over which they go. The anapaests of the Chorus that conclude the *Hecuba* and the *Supplices* of Euripides also refer definitely to the marching they accompany and to its supposed goal. Like the *Rheingold* music, too, they reflect the mood in which the drama concludes, which happens to be quite different in the two cases: *Hecuba*, 1293-1295, "Go to the harbor and the tents, friends, and make trial of the labors ordered by our masters. Cruel is necessity," and *Supplices*, 1232-1234, "Let us go, Adrastus, and give pledges to this man and the city; worthy of honor is their toil for us."

In the last part of Act III of *Siegfried* the orchestral and vocal parts are as closely united as the choral and solo parts in the *κομμός* that concludes the *Persae* of Aeschylus. The orchestra supports the voices with all the volume at its command, and gives sympathetic expression to the emotions that dominate the scene. The joy of Siegfried and Brünnhilde is as ecstatic as the grief of Xerxes is overwhelming, and the few measures played by the orchestra after their last words simply conclude its reflection of their joy, as the last lines of the Chorus conclude their reflection of their king's sorrow (*Pers.* 1074-1076): "I will convoy thee with sad laments and groans."

The *Flying Dutchman* ends with action, like the *Electra* of Sophocles. The Dutchman's redemption is accomplished when Senta throws herself into the sea, and the restoration of Agamemnon's dominion to its rightful owner is accomplished by the death of Aegisthus. Then, in the *Flying Dutch-*



man, the orchestra briefly sums up the situation by playing the *Redemption* motive in its most triumphant form, and recalling in the *Dutchman* motive the suffering from which the hero has been freed. The Chorus does practically the same thing with reference to Orestes, when it says (1508-1510), "O seed of Atreus, after much suffering, in freedom thou hast but now emerged, by this attempt restored to thy right place."

It is worth noting that the first drama in which Wagner's style reaches its full development, *Tristan and Isolde*, is also the first for which he wrote a quiet orchestral conclusion.<sup>1</sup> From that time on, he ended every one of his tragic works in this way.

<sup>1</sup> Also the first one written after his reading of Greek tragedy. Cf. p. 3.

## CHAPTER XII

### LONG SCENES AND SPEECHES

NEXT to the important part assigned to the orchestra, the most striking characteristic of form in Wagner's dramas is, perhaps, the prevalence of long scenes between two, or at most three, actors. He followed the Greek custom so far as to construct his dramas almost entirely in this way. Sometimes there is a chorus on the stage as well, or a smaller group that serves a similar artistic purpose, like the Rhinemaidens, the Valkyrs, or the squires to whom Gurnemanz tells the story of Amfortas and Klingsor. When such a group is introduced, its dramatic functions are likely to resemble those of the Greek Chorus in the *Epeisodia*. The squires in the first act of *Parsifal* are sympathetic listeners, like, for example, the Chorus of Oceanides in the *Prometheus*. In both cases their presence and their questions give opportunity for the narration of what occurred before the drama begins. Once in Wagner, a group (the Rhinemaidens in *Rheingold*) is made a character in the drama, with interests at stake, like the Chorus in the *Supplices* of Aeschylus. In no case, however, are the separate members of these groups differentiated, and in estimating the number of characters taking part in a scene we are justified in considering the group always as a dramatic unit, and frequently as corresponding to the Greek Chorus.

In five of the ten music-dramas, then, we find no scene in which there are more than three actors. These are the *Flying Dutchman*, *Tristan and Isolde*, *Walküre*, *Siegfried*, and *Parsifal*. In the *Götterdämmerung* there are only two scenes

where more than three appear (I, 3, and a part of II), and these are very brief. Similarly limited in the number of characters introduced are two of the four scenes of *Rheingold* and the greater part of *Tannhäuser* (including most of Act I, the first half of Act II, and all of Act III). This leaves only *Lohengrin* and *Meistersinger*, in each of which there is one entire scene where no more than three characters appear (*Loh.* III, 1, and *Meist.* III, 1).

Characteristic of Greek tragic dialogue are the long speeches and the contrasting *στιχομυθία*. Long speeches occur often in Wagner's works as well, and it is in these that he secures some of his finest effects. Seldom, however, does he employ any rapid alternation of speakers resembling *στιχομυθία*. In *Parsifal*, II, 1, Klingsor and Kundry answer each other for a time in short sentences, but no feeling of balance is produced or desired. Perhaps the nearest approach to *στιχομυθία* is in the quarrel between Alberich and Mime before Fafner's cave in *Siegfried*, II. Alberich's first three questions are each three lines long, and Mime answers each in three lines; then Alberich is given four lines at once, and Mime answers in four lines; and after three of these eight-line groups have been thus divided between them, Alberich's angry utterance suddenly expands to ten lines and Mime's reply equals it, after which both limit themselves to five lines. The lines are so short and the delivery so rapid that the effect of the alternating three- and four-line exclamations is not unlike that of *στιχομυθία*.

Some of the finest passages in Wagner are the "narratives," long speeches in which a character relates what is supposed to have happened off the stage, or before the beginning of the drama. The events so described are often as interesting and as important as any that are represented. In this respect the speeches resemble many of the most splendid passages in Greek tragedy; but while the latter are not infrequently put

in the mouths of characters, like the messengers, who are not personally affected to any great extent by what they describe so vividly, in Wagner the character who tells the story is generally the one most deeply concerned. In *Tannhäuser*, III, Tannhäuser gives an account of his pilgrimage to Rome, which serves a dramatic purpose similar to that of the speech of Prometheus in Aeschylus's *Prometheus*, 199-243. The services which Tannhäuser and Prometheus have performed, and the condemnation to punishment which is their reward, must be known, if the audience is to understand fully their situation and their feelings. Besides this, Tannhäuser's narrative, like that of Prometheus, makes us realize, more keenly than any complaint could, the injustice in the treatment the speaker has received. In *Tristan and Isolde*, Act I, Isolde describes her first meeting with Tristan. It took place before the opening of the drama, but we recognize in it the beginning and cause of all that is put before us. The meeting of Oedipus with Laius bears a similar relation to the plot of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and the dramatic purpose of the speech in which he describes it (771-833) is like that of Isolde's. Long accounts, like these, of something outside the drama, but closely related to it, are common in Wagner, and many are raised, by the music that is an essential part of them, to a level of high poetic beauty. Such are Lohengrin's description of the Grail and its knights (*Loh.* III, 2), Siegmund's story of his adventures, and Sieglinde's account of Wotan's visit to Hunding's feast (*Wk.* I), and the story of Amfortas and Klingsor which Gurnemanz tells in *Parsifal*, I.

Waltraute, in *Götterdämmerung*, I, 4, is perhaps the only one of Wagner's characters that may be compared to an *ἄγγελος*. Her personality is subordinated to her message, and we are interested in what she tells for its own sake, not because it is a part of her experience. Through her eyes we see the gods in *Walhall*, just as, in Euripides's *Bacchæ*, 677 ff., we see the

Theban women in the forest through the eyes of the messenger. His description of the manner in which the cattle are torn limb from limb by the frenzied women prepares for the later description of the death of Pentheus, which is the climax of the drama (1043 ff.). Similarly, Waltraute's narrative prepares for the climax and conclusion of the *Götterdämmerung*, in which we see Wotan sitting with the gods, while *Walhall* is burned by the flames that rise from the funeral pyre of Siegfried.

Less frequent are the long speeches that might be called meditations, delivered when no other characters are present as listeners. Sachs's "Wahn! Wahn!" (*Meist.* III) and "Wie duftet" (*Meist.* II), the Flying Dutchman's "Die Frist ist um" (Act I), and Siegfried's reflections in the *Waldweben* scene (*Sf.* II) are examples. The almost constant presence of the Chorus as listeners makes such meditations seldom possible in Greek tragedy. However, we do find them occasionally, as in *Agamemnon*, 1 ff., *Prometheus*, 88 ff., and, if we include lyric measures, the lovely song of Ion (82 ff.).

Instances in Wagner where a sudden passionate outcry is followed by a quieter, more restrained passage are:

Wotan's scene with Brünnhilde in *Walküre*, II.

Elizabeth's plea for Tannhäuser in *Tannhäuser*, II.

Sieglinde's "Weiter! Weiter!" followed by "Da er sie liebend," etc., in *Walküre*, II.

The plaint of Amfortas in *Parsifal*, I, 2.

The instances in Greek tragedy are numerous. Among them are:

Aeschylus, *Prometheus*, 561 ff. and 640 ff.

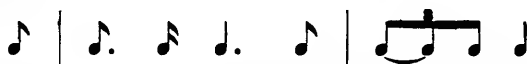
Sophocles, *Ajax*, 33 ff. and 430 ff.; *Electra*, 84 ff. and 254 ff.; *Trachiniae*, 983 ff. and 1046 ff.

Euripides, *Alcestis*, 244 ff. and 280 ff.; *Medea*, 96 ff. and 214 ff.

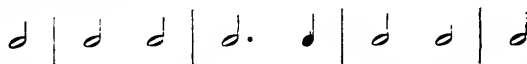
## CHAPTER XIII

### A FEW REMARKS ON RHYTHMS

As the rhythms in Greek were determined by the length of successive syllables, it is generally possible to decide what they were by reading the words. But we may read Wagner's text without getting any idea of the variety of rhythm, even in the vocal parts, while the effects often produced by conflicting rhythms in the orchestra must, of course, be heard to be appreciated. In the first act of *Tristan*, the sailor's song and Kurwenal's answer to Isolde begin with lines that seem to the reader rhythmically identical: "Frisch weht der Wind der Heimat zu" and "Wer Kornwalls Kron' und Englands Erb'." But Wagner makes of the former a graceful phrase in three-quarter metre, running through a little less than two measures:



and of the latter a heavy, emphatic phrase in four-four metre, filling four measures:



In passages of emotional intensity the musical element becomes more important than the verbal, and several tones are sometimes sung to one syllable. Sieglinde, in the last act of *Walküre*, sings sixteen tones to nine syllables:



To produce this rhythm in Greek, it would be necessary to use words with more syllables; as, for instance,

καὶ θαυμάσιόν μοι τόδ' ἐστίν,  
παρθένε κυδρὰ μάλιστ' —

Wagner's habit of giving rhythmical prominence to the important words in a phrase is invariable. In the following lines from Elsa's prayer <sup>1</sup>the italicized words receive rhythmical emphasis:

"O Herr, nun meinem Ritter sage,  
dass er mir *helf'* in meiner *Not*."

Not only do they fall on accented beats, but they are also sustained much longer than the less important words which connect them. This is far from being a constant practice with opera-composers, as it is with Wagner, and as it was with the Greeks. An example chosen at random is (*O. T.* 203 ff.):

Λύκει' ἄναξ, τά τε σὰ χρυσοστρόφων ἀπ' ἀγκυλᾶν  
βέλεα θέλομι· ἂν ἀδάματ' ἐνδατεῖσθαι  
ἄρωγὰ προσταχθέντα.

(The underscored words are those which contain long syllables.)

Such comparisons make one keenly aware of the difference between the two languages. Long words in Greek do not necessarily produce a sense of heaviness, as they generally do in German or in English. The large number of vowels and liquids prevents this, and it often seems as though each syllable brought with it an additional grace. Cf. *Eur. Hec.* 923 ff., and *I. T.* 427 ff.:

ὅπου πεντήκοντα κορᾶν  
Νηρηΐδων . . . χοροὶ  
μέλπουσιν ἐγκύκλιοι,  
πλησιυστίοισι πνοαῖς

συριζόντων κατὰ πρύμναν  
 εἰναίων πηδαλίων  
 αὔραις <σὺν> νοτίαις  
 ἢ πνεύμασι Ζεφύρου,  
 τὰν πολυόρνιθον ἐπ' αἰ-  
 αν, λευκὰν ἀκτάν, Ἀχιλῆ-  
 ος δρόμους καλλισταδίους,  
 ἄξεινον κατὰ πόντον;

There is an undulating quality in the words, like that of a musical phrase. Beside it German words are rough and choppy. But Wagner often avoids this effect by stretching the words over phrases that join the ragged edges so smoothly that we are not conscious of them. This is what he does in such passages as "Die Liebe lockte den Lenz," in Siegmund's *Spring Song*.

Long tones in Wagner's scores, like long syllables in the Greek tragic lyrics, appear in large numbers in prayers and invocations. Examples may be found in the prayers of Elsa, Elizabeth, Tannhäuser ("Erbarm' dich mein," in Act II), Parsifal ("Erlöser! Heiland! Herr der Huld," in Act II), Amfortas (Act III), as also in Aeschylus, *Seven against Thebes*, 166 ff., *Choëphoroi*, 783 ff., *Eumenides*, 321 ff.; Sophocles, *Ajax*, 596 ff., *Philoctetes*, 1080 ff.; Euripedes, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, 123 ff. Throughout the last of these passages long syllables predominate, and consequently the occasional groups of short ones stand out in bold relief (137-138, 220, 232). This rhythmic speeding occurs where personal feeling is uppermost. Wagner has recourse to it in similar passages in the prayers of Elizabeth, Elsa, Ortrud (Act II), and Siegmund (Act I).

Groups of short syllables are used to express fright in Aeschylus, *Seven against Thebes*, 239-241, *Persae*, 256 f., *Prometheus*, 183 and 904; Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 1313-1314, as are short tones when Elsa foresees Lohengrin's departure (Act III), when Sieglinde fears that Hunding will kill Sieg-



mund (*Wk.* II), when the Flower-maidens are frightened at Parsifal's arrival, and whenever Mime gives expression to cringing terror in *Rheingold* and *Siegfried* (especially, Act I).

A cursory search through Wagner's scores for instances in which he uses typical Greek lyric rhythms led to the discovery of the following:<sup>1</sup>

1. Trochaic — *Nature* motive (*Ring*).

— ◡ | — ◡ | — ◡ | —

This motive, as has been shown, is used frequently in the *Ring* to produce effects similar to those produced by references to Zeus in the choral odes in the *Oresteia*. It is interesting, therefore, to note that the rhythm of this motive is the same as the rhythm of the first lyric reference to Zeus in the *Agamemnon*, 160 ff. Fifteen of the twenty-four lines of this passage in the Oxford text could be sung to the *Nature* motive. It begins:

Zeús, ὅστις ποτ' ἐστίν, εἰ τόδ' αὖ-  
τῷ φίλον κεκλημένῳ,  
τοῦτό νῦν προσεννέπω.

2. Iambic — *Donner* motive (*Ring*).

◡ — | ◡ — | ◡ — |

3. Dactylic — Brünnhilde's

"War es so schmählich

.....  
War es so niedrig?" (*Wk.* III).

— ◡ ◡ | — — |  
— ◡ ◡ | — — |

4. Logaoedic — the first Rhinemaiden's song in the begin-

<sup>1</sup> In these examples the value of all long tones is not exactly the same, nor is that of all short tones; neither has every long tone twice the value of a short one. The signs represent the note values only approximately.

ning of *Rheingold*, in which the melody and rhythm are everything, as the words have no meaning.

— ∪ | — ∪ | ∪ ∪ ∪ | — ∪ |  
 ∪ ∪ ∪ | — ∪ | ∪ ∪ ∪ | — ∪ |  
 — ∪ ∪ | — ∪ ∪ |            | L |

5. Cretic — *Fate* motive (*Ring*).

— ∪ —

6. Choriambic — the *Adventure* motive (sometimes called the *Desire for Travel*) in the *Ring*.

— ∪ ∪ —

Also, in *Walküre*, III, Wotan's

“Hörtet ihr nicht,  
was ich verhängt?

.....

Schreckt euch ihr Loos?

.....

Weichet von ihr.”

Also, in *Walküre*, II, Siegmund's

“Heiss in der Brust  
brennt mich der Eid.”

Also, in *Siegfried*, II, Mime's

“Leer soll ich geh'n,  
ganz ohne Lohn'?”

7. Ionic — in *Siegfried*, I, Siegfried's

“Aus dem Wald fort,  
in die Welt zieh'n.  
Nimmer kehr' ich zurück.”

∪ ∪ — — | ∪ ∪ — — | ∪ ∪ L | ∪ ∪ L |

8. Dochmiac — *Sympathy* motive (*Wk. I*).

∪ ∪ ∪ | — ∪ — |

It is possible that a thorough study of Greek and Wagnerian rhythms might lead to the discovery of some interesting points.

## CHAPTER XIV

### POINTS OF RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN WAGNER AND THE GREEK TRAGIC POETS

LIKE Euripides, Wagner shattered the traditions of the art-form in which he worked, and they have not been rebuilt on the old foundations. Even Italian opera has felt his influence and become less purely lyric and more dramatic. Yet his works are as different from Puccini's, for instance, as the *Alcestis* is from a comedy of Menander.

With Sophocles Wagner has, perhaps, nothing in common except the perfect command of his chief medium of expression. He selects and combines orchestral effects with an instinct for values as unerring as that which guided Sophocles in his choice of words; and the resulting product is as full of *nuances* and subtlety.

It was the first of the great tragic poets, however, whose dramas appealed most strongly to Wagner, and his works testify to this. There is an Aeschylean grandeur in the scores, and their harmonies are as arresting as the images of the Greek poet. Both blaze with imagination and glow with passion without losing, for a moment, their essential majesty. With profound seriousness the musician and the poet have embodied in their dramas truths so simple that any one could understand them, yet of such universal import that all could derive something from their contemplation. It seems to have been natural to both Aeschylus and Wagner to construct on a large scale. Only the magnificent unity of purpose in such works as the *Oresteia* and the *Ring* keeps them from becoming obscured by their own bulk. But every scene built into the

structure is put there not merely for the sake of its own beauty or interest, but because it gives another view of the central idea. Each incident in the plot brings together characters who have come by different ways. If our perceptions are keen, we may get a glimpse of these paths, and also of countless roads leading onward. The Chorus of Aeschylus and the orchestra of Wagner reveal them. By throwing many lights on a single incident they make its full significance clear. Events cannot bear this exhaustive treatment unless they involve feelings so fundamental as to come — in some lesser form — within the experience of almost any life. Of such is the substance of the dramas of Aeschylus and of Wagner. Aeschylus makes us realize that there is no punishment more terrible than that which sin draws upon itself; Wagner makes us see that there is no action more noble than that which begins in the sorrow of sympathy and ends in the joy of self-forgetfulness in heroic service.

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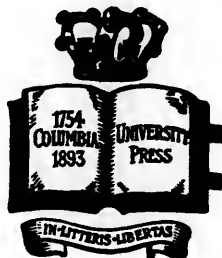
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